NEW

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

From the makers of HISTORY of WAR

◆ REAL STORIES OF VALOUR AND SACRIFICE FROM THE FRONTLINE ◆

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FIRST EDITION

MEDAL ORIGINS

From Queen Victoria's design touches to the first investiture ceremonies

EMPIRE'S WARRIORS

Honouring those who served crown and country from across the globe

169 YEAR HISTORY

Inspiring acts across the centuries from the Crimean War to modern conflict


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VICTORIA CROSS HEROES

Awarded for ‘conspicuous bravery in the presence of the enemy’, the Victoria Cross (VC) is Britain’s highest military award for gallantry in combat. From its 19th century origins, it became an egalitarian symbol recognising valour regardless of rank, background or class. The citations behind these medals reveal immense feats of heroism that have inspired, moved and astonished the public across the decades, bringing to public attention the peril and tragic realities of war, but also the extremes of human potential. Across over 150 years, including two world wars, men of the British Empire and later the Commonwealth put their lives on the line in service of crown and country, or to protect their comrades in arms. The following pages recount a few of their incredible stories.



VICTORIA CROSS
HEROES

CONTENTS

6 TIMELINE
10 ORIGINS & EARLY HISTORY
12 DESIGN & PRODUCTION
14 PROTOCOLS & PRECEDENTS

NINETEENTH CENTURY

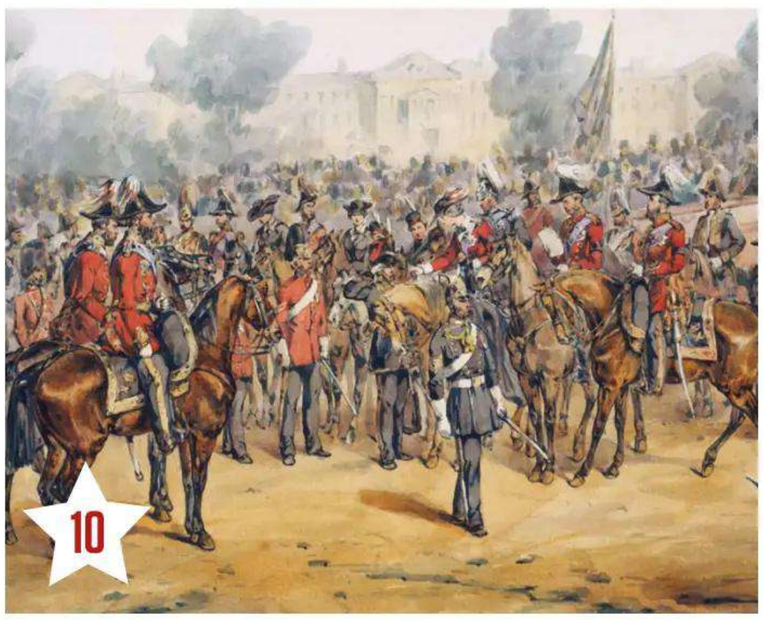
18 WILLIAM HALL
22 NEVILLE HOWSE
26 ALEXANDER ROBERTS DUNN
30 CHRISTOPHER TEESDALE
34 JOHN BISDEE

FIRST WORLD WAR

40 ARTHUR MARTIN-LEAKE
44 HENRY JAMES NICHOLAS
48 EDWARD MANNOCK
52 ADRIAN CARTON DE WIART
56 LESLIE WILTON ANDREW
60 WILLIAM LEEFE ROBINSON
64 KHUDADAD KHAN
68 ROWLAND BOURKE

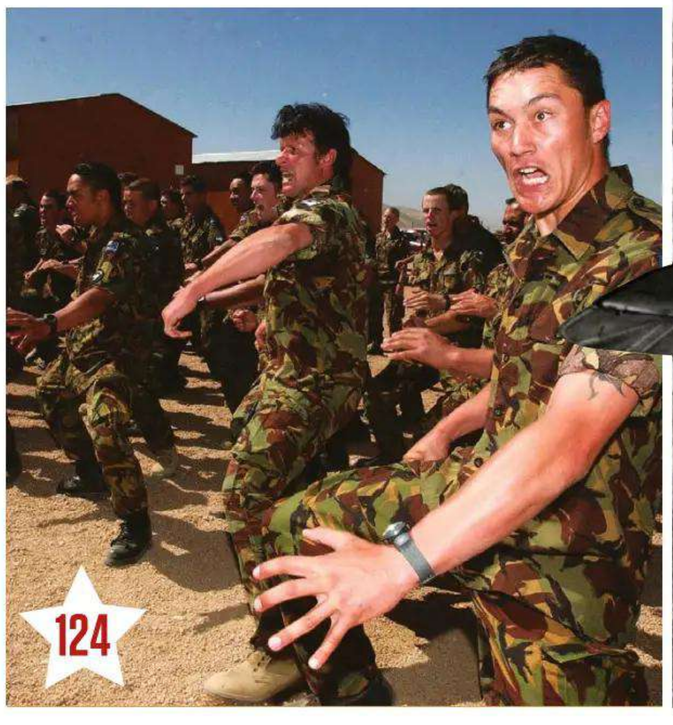




















SECOND WORLD WAR

74 DONALD CAMERON
78 AGANSING RAI
82 ERNEST SMITH
86 JAMES ALLEN WARD
90 JAMES BRINDLEY NICOLSON
94 TUL BAHADUR PUN
98 JAMES MAGENNIS

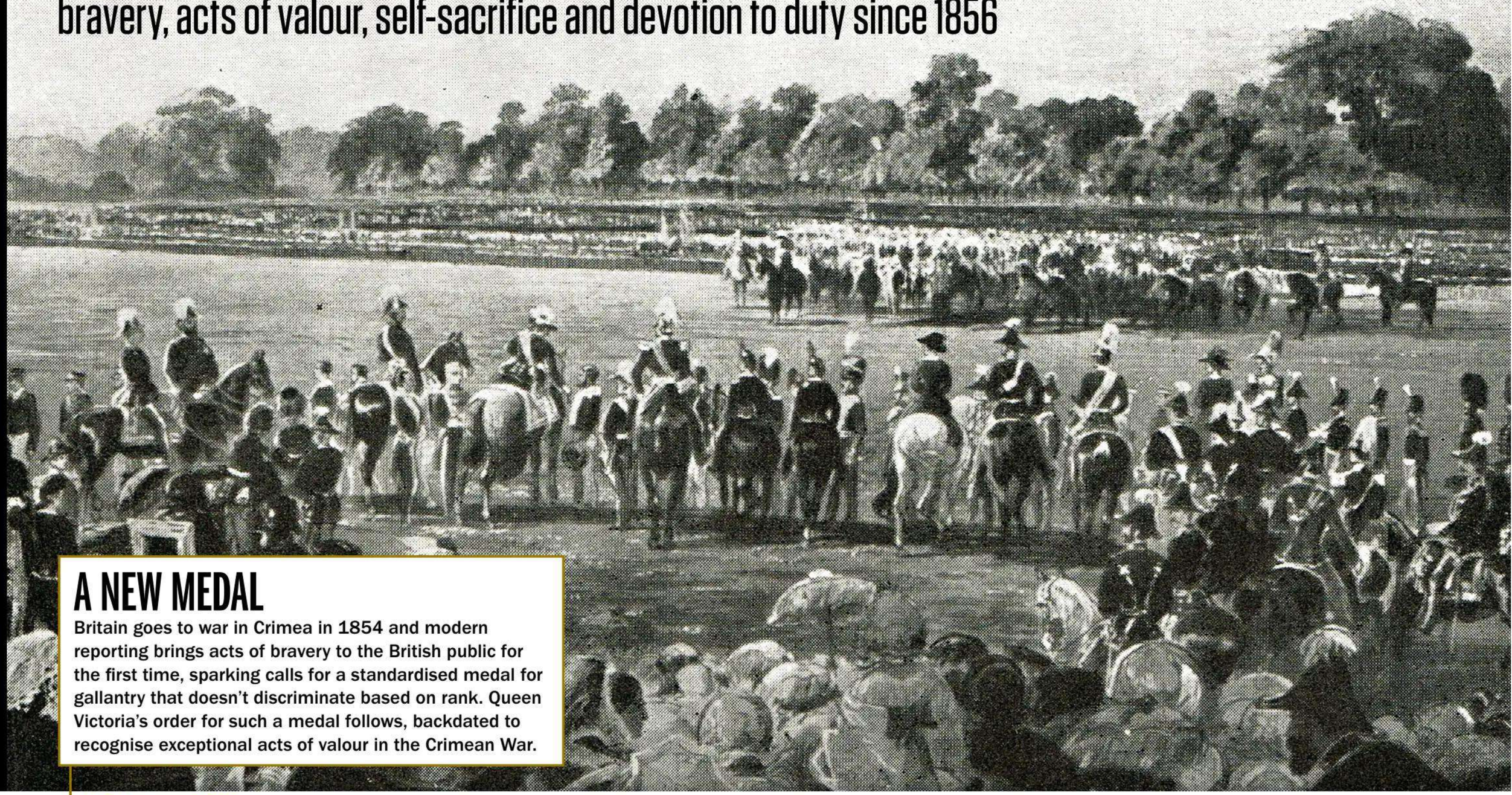
POST-WWII

104 KEITH PAYNE
108 JOHNSON BEHARRY
112 IAN MCKAY
116 RAMBAHADUR LIMBU
120 PETER BADCOE
124 WILLIE APIATA

TIMELINE OF THE

VICTORIA CROSS

The most prestigious decoration in the British Armed Forces has recognised conspicuous bravery, acts of valour, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty since 1856



A NEW MEDAL

Britain goes to war in Crimea in 1854 and modern reporting brings acts of bravery to the British public for the first time, sparking calls for a standardised medal for gallantry that doesn't discriminate based on rank. Queen Victoria's order for such a medal follows, backdated to recognise exceptional acts of valour in the Crimean War.

29 January 1856

4 March 1856

FIRST VCs CAST 01

London-based jewellers Hancocks & Co are commissioned to make the first VCs after the Crimean War. They submit several proofs, starting in January 1856, until one is finally accepted on 3 March 1856. An order for 106 VCs to be cast arrives the following day.

FIRST CEREMONY

During a ceremony in Hyde Park, London, Queen Victoria awards 62 of the 111 VCs given for Crimean War service. She stays on horseback for the entire ceremony, rising above the recipients. The 100,000 spectators cheer and applaud throughout.

***Right:** Queen Victoria pins a VC to Captain of the Mast George, Henry Ingouville, for his actions in the Baltic Campaign*

26 June 1857





The first VC ceremony was held at Hyde Park on 26 June 1857, where 62 VCs were awarded

FIRST POSTHUMOUS AWARD

Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, 27, becomes the first posthumous VC recipient. He is recognised for his actions at the Battle of Colenso during the Second Boer War to save British guns from enemy capture. He dies two days later but is recommended for the medal.



At the Battle of Colenso the defeated British suffered 143 killed, 756 wounded and 220 captured

COLONIAL TROOP ELIGIBILITY 03

Colonial troops become eligible for the VC following the gallantry of Major Charles Heaphy during the New Zealand Wars in 1864. Although Heaphy was born in London, he serves with the Auckland Volunteer Rifles and is recognised for his actions at Mangapiko Stream.

A FEMALE VC 04

In 1869, Elizabeth Webber Harris is decorated with an unofficial VC for her work as a nurse during a cholera outbreak among her regiment in India, which kills one-third of the soldiers. Although women are not eligible, Harris is given a replica VC from the officers of the regiment with special permission from Queen Victoria.

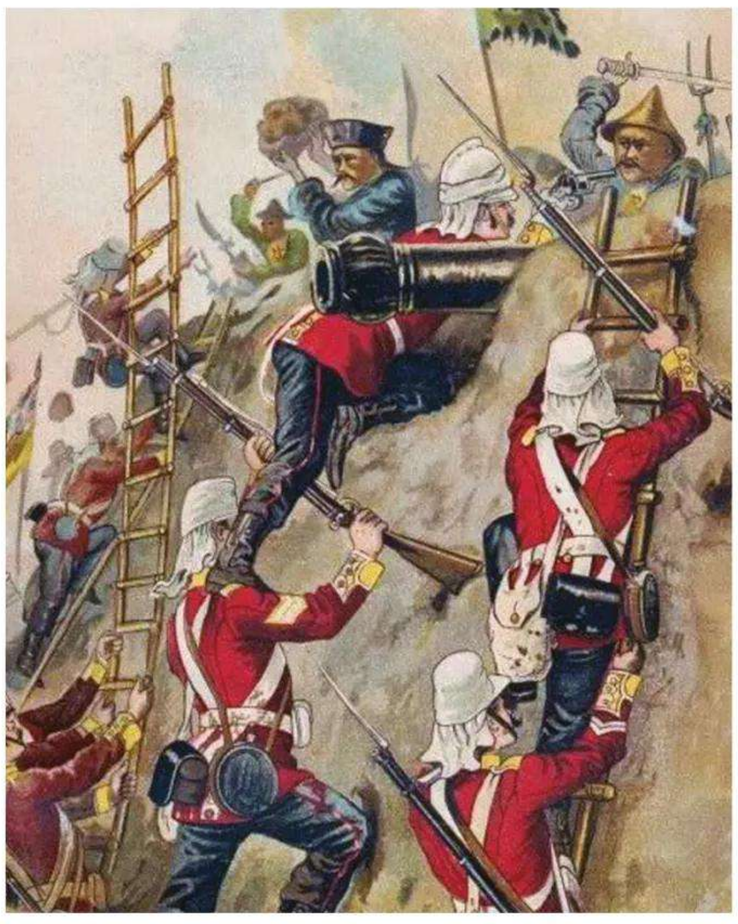
1867 — 1869 — December 1899

21 August 1860 — 22-23 January 1878

YOUNGEST RECIPIENT 02

At just 15 years and three months, Andrew Fitzgibbon, a hospital apprentice in the Indian Medical Establishment, earns his VC during the Third China War. Under heavy fire during an assault on a fortress, Fitzgibbon runs across open ground to attend to the wounded, becoming severely injured himself in the effort.

The 67th (South Hampshire) Regiment of Foot take a fort during the action that earned Fitzgibbon his VC



RORKE'S DRIFT 05

Eleven VCs, the largest number awarded for a single engagement, are given to survivors of Rorke's Drift after a small British unit holds off thousands of Zulu troops while defending a mission station. However, there is no provision for posthumous VCs for the 17 dead.



Private William Jones defends a field hospital at Rorke's Drift

Images © Alamy, Getty

FIRST DOUBLE VC 06

JOSHUA LEAKEY 08

FIRST MEDALS CAST 01

YOUNGEST RECIPIENT 02

A FEMALE VC 04

FALKLANDS WAR 07

RORKE'S DRIFT 05

COLONIAL TROOP ELIGIBILITY 03

1914-18

FIRST WORLD WAR AWARDS

A total of 628 VCs are awarded during WWI, the largest number for a single conflict and almost half of those ever given. Captain Noel Chavasse receives two, at the Somme in 1916 and Passchendaele in 1917 – where he is mortally wounded.



Fighter ace Albert Ball, whose 44 victories earned him a VC, poses with trophies taken from one of his kills

1914

FIRST DOUBLE AWARD 06

Lieutenant Arthur Martin-Leake becomes the first double VC winner. The surgeon earned his first VC in the Boer War, being shot multiple times while assisting wounded men. His second is given during the First World War for rescuing wounded men close to enemy trenches during fighting near Zonnebeke, Belgium.



Martin-Leake wearing his VC

DICKIN MEDAL INSTITUTED

The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) begins presenting the Dickin Medal to honour the work of animals serving in the Second World War. It bears the words "We Also Serve" and is regarded as the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross.



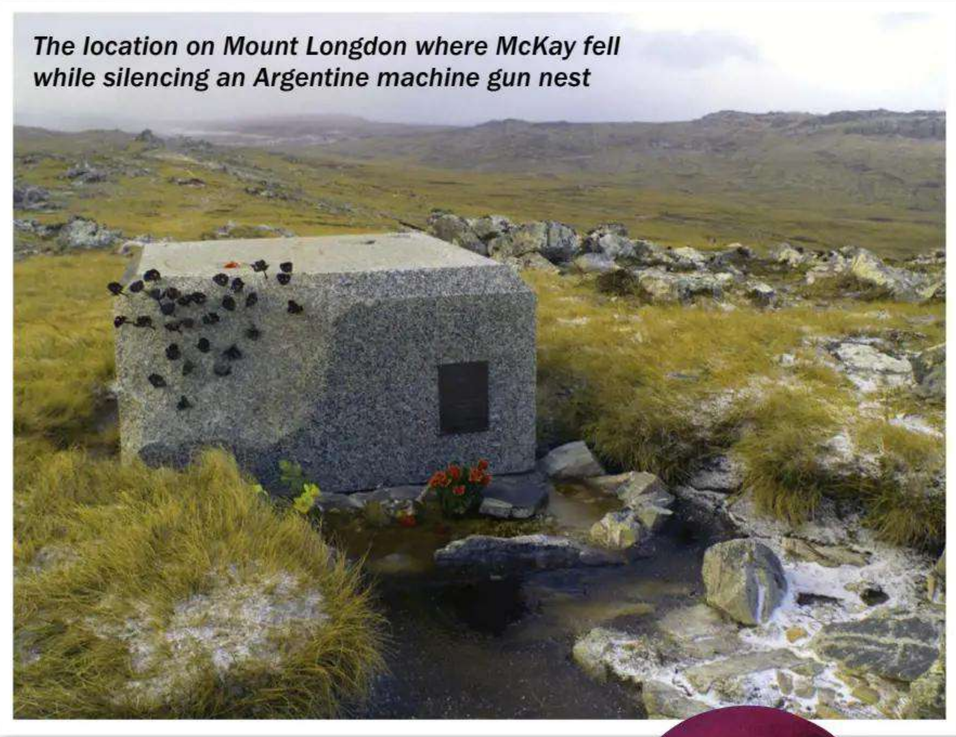
***Below:** Captain K Hunter Dunn handles a carrier pigeon Dickin Medal recipient in Berlin before its farewell flight to England*

GEORGE CROSS INTRODUCED

Equal in stature to the VC, the George Cross (GC) is introduced for gallantry not in the presence of an enemy. It came after the VC criteria was changed to only include acts "in the face of the enemy" in 1881. The GC has now been awarded 416 times to individuals and collectively to Malta, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the NHS.

FALKLANDS WAR 07

Two VCs are awarded posthumously to Parachute Regiment soldiers following the Falklands War. Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Jones earns his for a solo charge on Darwin Hill that resulted in his death, and Sergeant Ian McKay receives one following his heroic actions in the battle to capture Mount Longdon.



The location on Mount Longdon where McKay fell while silencing an Argentine machine gun nest

JOSHUA LEAKEY 08

In 2015 Sergeant Joshua Leakey receives a recommendation for the VC for his actions to defend his patrol from an insurgent attack. During the action he also secured the evacuation of an injured US Marine captain. He is the only living soldier awarded a VC during the War in Afghanistan.



***Right:** Leakey with his VC at Windsor Castle*

1939-45 | 1940 | 1943 | 1982 | 1991-99 | 2015

SECOND WORLD WAR AWARDS

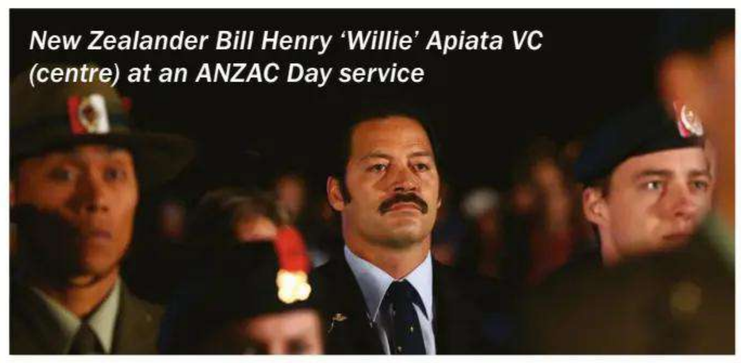
The Second World War sees 182 VCs awarded, 85 of which are given posthumously. Lieutenant Commander Gerard Roope is the first to execute an action deemed worthy of a VC after his skill and bravery commanding the destroyer HMS Glowworm in the Norwegian Sea against a much larger German force, although the award isn't gazetted until 1945.



Flight Sergeant John Hannah VC sits in the upper turret of his Handley Page Hampden bomber

COMMONWEALTH VICTORIA CROSS SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED

Commonwealth nations start to establish their own VC systems. Australia's is first (1991), followed by Canada (1993) and New Zealand (1999). Australia and New Zealand have awarded their first VCs but Canada is yet to do so.



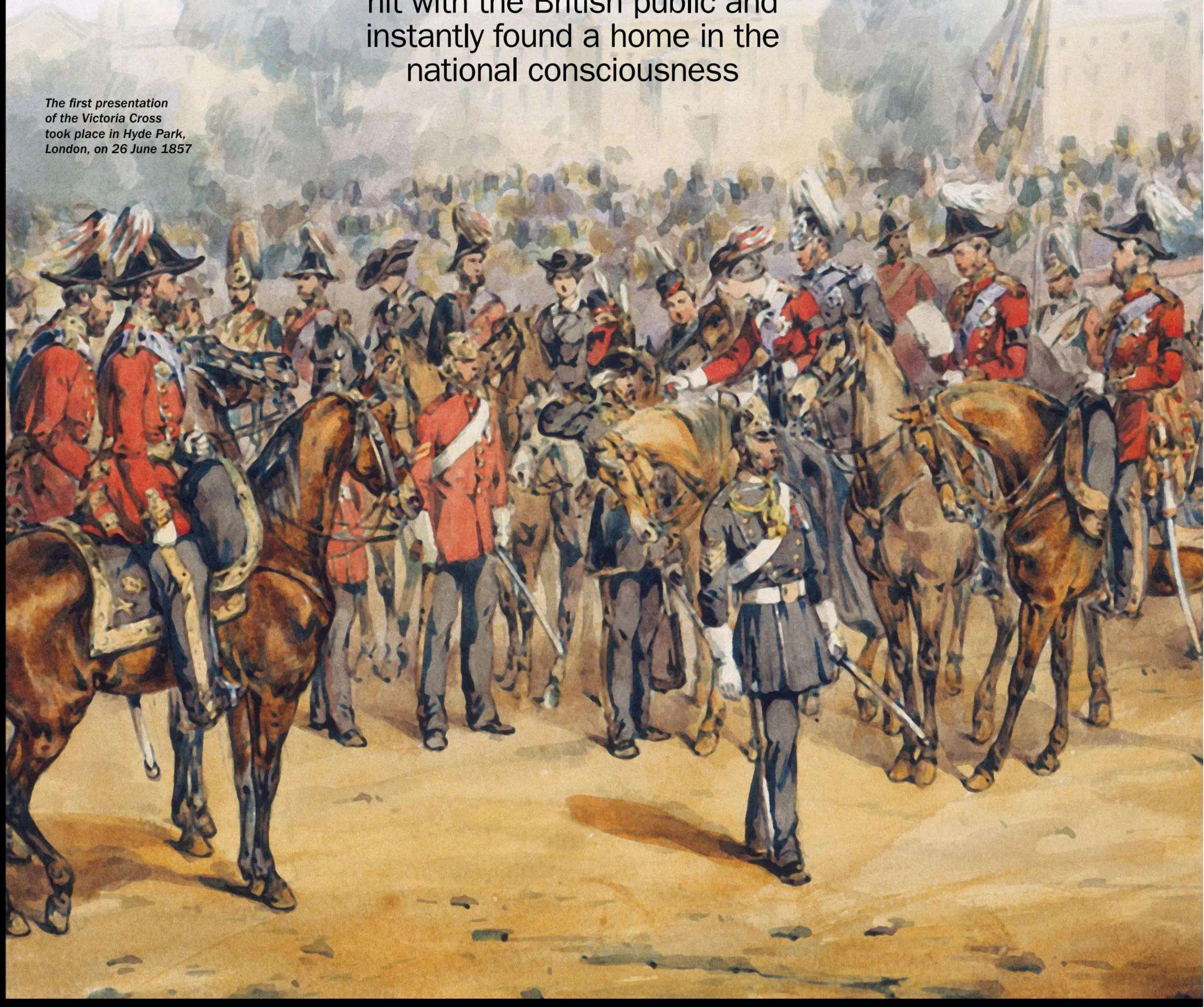
New Zealander Bill Henry 'Willie' Apiata VC (centre) at an ANZAC Day service

Images © Alamy, Getty

ORIGINS & EARLY HISTORY

Born out of an unpopular war, the Victoria Cross was a big hit with the British public and instantly found a home in the national consciousness

The first presentation of the Victoria Cross took place in Hyde Park, London, on 26 June 1857



At the end of the Crimean War in 1856 the British public was seething with rage. The country had emerged on the winning side but, at home, the campaign was considered a debacle, one that had provoked anti-war protests, a riot in central London and brought down Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon. The conflict was the first to be comprehensively covered by the media. Reports of the appalling medical and sanitary conditions endured by British troops had shocked the nation, while military blunders like the Charge of the Light Brigade had enraged it. The war had cost the country £80 million (approximately £12 billion today) and the lives of over 20,000 troops – most killed by cholera. All this was for negligible gains. The British Empire may have been approaching its peak, but public faith in its military and political institutions was at a new low. The Establishment needed something that could switch up the narrative and needed it fast.

The Victoria Cross (VC) wasn't, as has been claimed, Queen Victoria's idea. In fact, the concept of a gallantry award available to all ranks wasn't even British. Egalitarianism was a founding principle of the French Revolution and Napoleon had introduced the distinctly meritocratic Legion of Honour as early as 1802. Until the Crimean War, however, medals for battlefield bravery within the British armed forces were reserved for the officer class.

In December 1854, when the war was just over a year old, the idea of an 'Order of Merit' awardable to any serviceman regardless of rank was put before Parliament for the first time. The following January, the Secretary of State for War, the Duke of Newcastle, made a formal recommendation to the monarch for a new award open to all ranks. It was approved and at the end of the month Newcastle announced the institution of the decoration in the House of Lords.

Anti-war sentiment, however, was gathering pace at home, and a few days after he made the announcement the government Newcastle served in collapsed. The job of overseeing the new award now fell to his successor Lord Panmure. Working with Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert, Panmure drafted a warrant. It had already been decided that the decoration should carry Victoria's name and in the earliest version of the warrant it was referred to as "the Military Order of Victoria". The forward-thinking Albert hated the stuffiness of the name and instead suggested "a cross granted for distinguished service".

It would take another year to get sign-off on the design and commission the first medals from Hancocks & Co – the London jewellers chosen to manufacture the medal. By the time the first batch of VCs was cast in March 1856, the Crimean War was over. The military now set about working out who might be eligible for the new award and boards of adjudication were set up. Recommendations were then requested from the officers in command of the eligible units. Results were mixed. Six regiments put forward zero recommendations while others entered dozens. One, the 77th Regiment, put forward no less than 38 names.

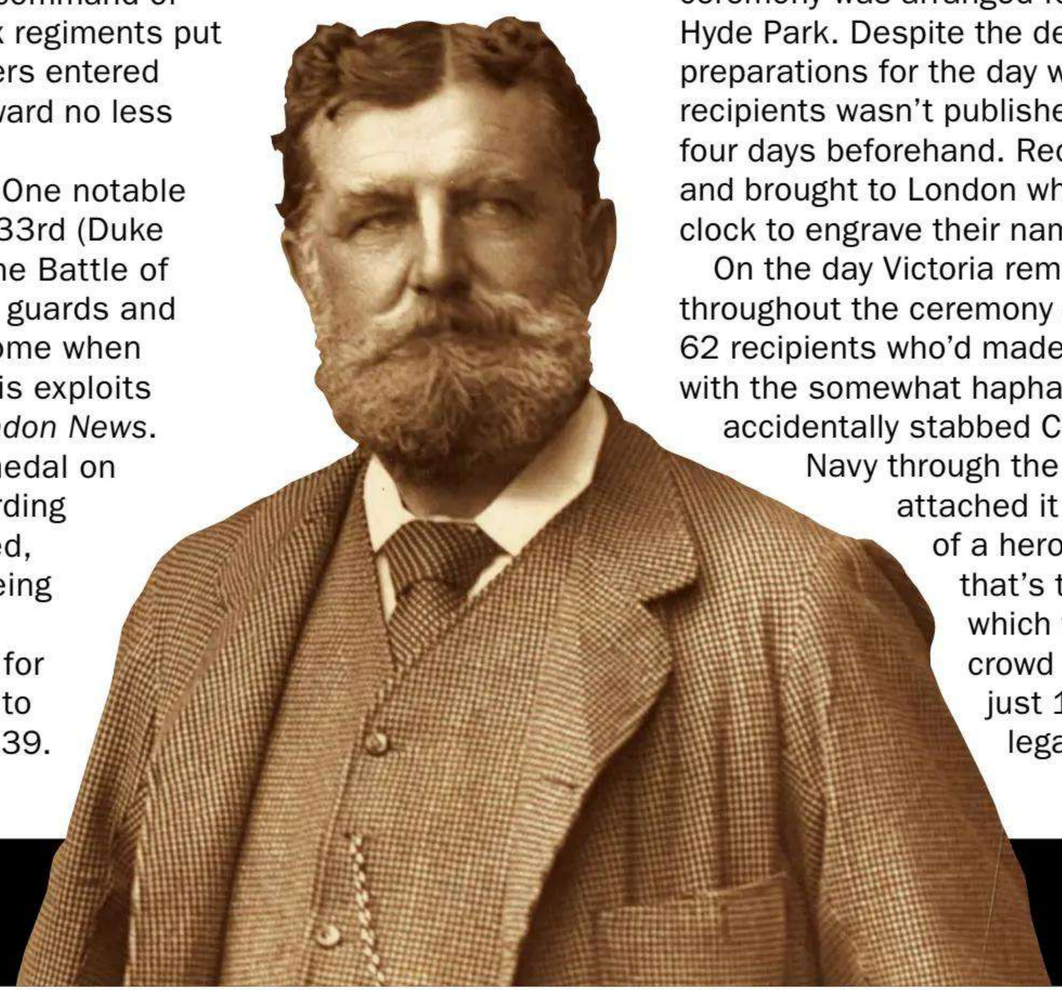
Not that every nominee was selected. One notable case was Private Patrick Maguire of the 33rd (Duke of Wellington's) Regiment. Captured at the Battle of Inkerman in 1854, he'd overpowered his guards and killed them. He'd received a hero's welcome when he'd made it back to his own lines and his exploits were made famous by *The Illustrated London News*. Queen Victoria, however, denied him a medal on the grounds of 'doubtful morality'. Rewarding troops for killing their captors, she argued, might eventually lead to seized troops being executed rather than incarcerated.

In the end, 111 men were put forward for the new VC, ranging in rank from private to lieutenant-colonel and in age from 17 to 39.



***Above:** The Illustrated London News' coverage of some of the first VCs, June 1857*

***Below:** Major-General Sir Christopher Charles Teesdale, the first South African-born VC recipient*



The recipients also hailed from more than half-a-dozen countries, including Great Britain, Ireland, South Africa, Canada, Germany, France and even Russia – Britain's foe in the Crimean War.

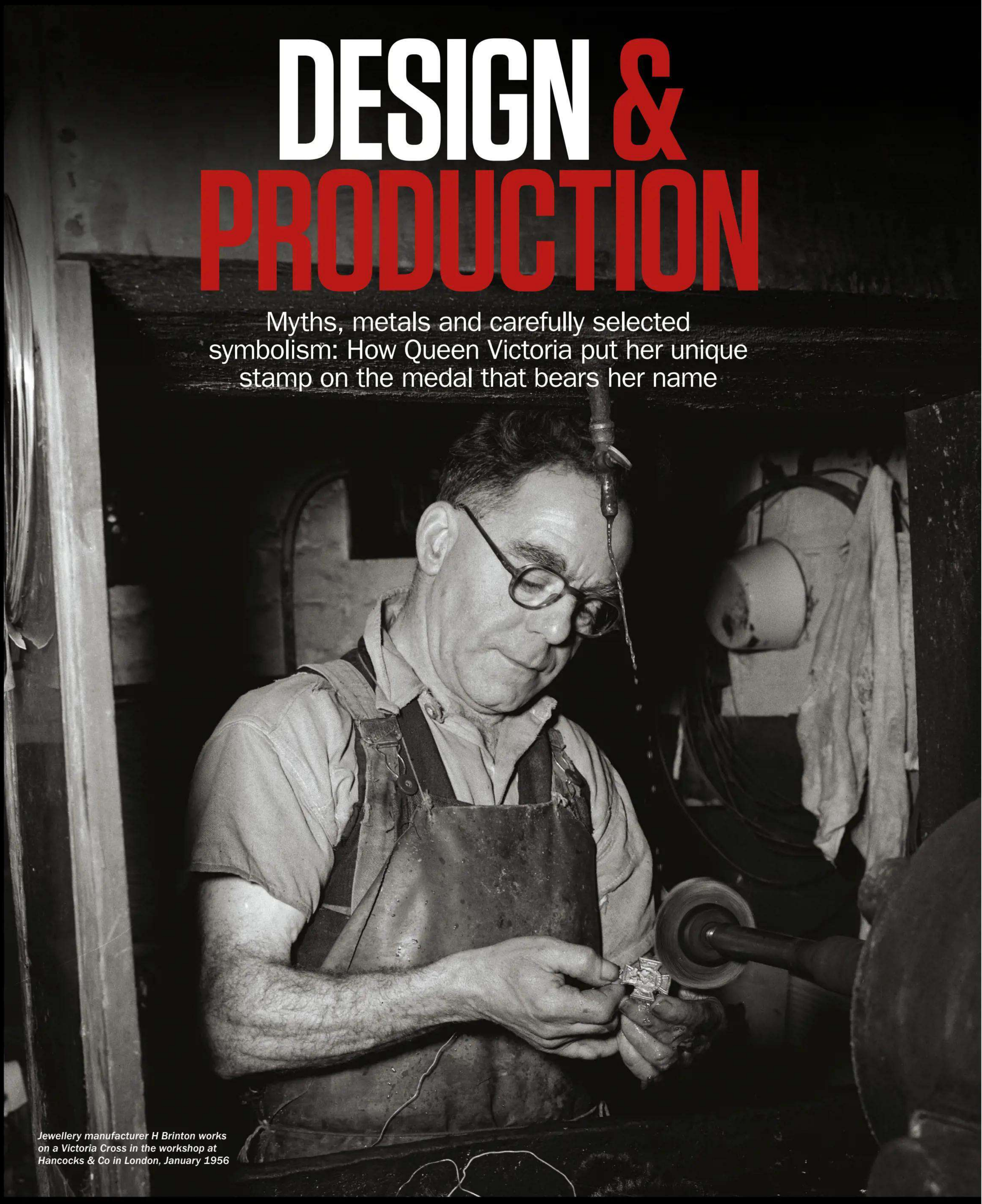
Victoria had been keen from the start to be seen bestowing the new award and a public investiture ceremony was arranged for 26 June 1857 in London's Hyde Park. Despite the delays in getting the medal ready, preparations for the day were rushed. The final list of recipients wasn't published in the *London Gazette* until four days beforehand. Recipients then had to be located and brought to London while Hancocks worked around the clock to engrave their names onto the VCs.

On the day Victoria remained mounted on horseback throughout the ceremony as she awarded medals to the 62 recipients who'd made it to the capital. In keeping with the somewhat haphazard preparations, the queen accidentally stabbed Commander Raby of the Royal Navy through the chest with his medal pin as she attached it to his uniform. As was befitting of a hero, Raby didn't even flinch. At least, that's the legend. The entire ceremony, which took place in front of a cheering crowd of around 100,000 people, took just 15 minutes to complete but its legacy remains with us to this day.

Images: Getty

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Myths, metals and carefully selected symbolism: How Queen Victoria put her unique stamp on the medal that bears her name



Jewellery manufacturer H Brinton works on a Victoria Cross in the workshop at Hancocks & Co in London, January 1956

In March 1857, four months before the first Victoria Crosses were given out, *The Daily Telegraph* made the following claims about the new medal: "The decoration consists of a Maltese Cross formed from a cannon captured from the Russians." The report, an early example of 'fake news', helped establish one of the many myths that surround the VC. Because of it, many people believe that all VCs are made from metal taken from Russian guns captured in the Crimea. Over time, this myth has evolved to include the claim that the guns in question were captured at the Battle of Sevastopol and, even more confusingly, were of Chinese origin. The truth, however, remains far from clear.

What is known is that Queen Victoria took great interest in the design of the new award. When the first drawings were submitted to her, she apparently picked an option that resembled an existing campaign medal, the Army Gold Cross from the Peninsular War (1808-14). It's said she then suggested some alterations. One was to make the award smaller, another was to change its motto from "For Bravery" to "For Valour" so that nobody would falsely conclude that the only brave men in a battle were those who'd won a VC. It's also claimed that she insisted the medal be cast from a base metal, arguing that the award's true value should be measured by what it stood for rather than what it was made from.

When Hancocks & Co, the jewellers commissioned to design the medal, sent the first proof to the Palace for approval, however, Victoria wasn't impressed. "The Cross looks very well in form," she reportedly said, "but the metal is ugly; it is copper and not bronze and will look very heavy on a red coat."

It was then, apparently, that somebody decided it would be fitting to use bronze taken from Russian cannons captured in the Crimea. An engineer was despatched to Woolwich Barracks in London, where two 16-pounders were placed at his disposal. Had he checked, the engineer might have realised that the guns weren't Russian nor had they been captured in the Crimea. They were, in fact, a pair of old Chinese guns that had been taken as trophies from the barrier forts near Canton at the start of the Second Opium War in 1856.

It's thought that metal was harvested from the cascabels of these guns – the knobs at the rear of their barrels used for attaching breeching ropes. According to Hancocks, this metal proved so hard that it cracked the dies its jewellers were using to strike the medals, forcing them to cast the awards instead. Not that every VC then or even since appears to have been cast using metal from these guns. X-ray analysis shows that the composition of the metal used in various VCs varies widely, not least in those made between 1942-45 when the Chinese gunmetal is said to have gone missing. In fact, some VCs are even made from brass alloys, not bronze.

Although the VC resembles a Maltese Cross, *The Daily Telegraph*'s report also got that part wrong. The award is actually a cross pattée (French for footed cross), or a Templar Cross with spreading ends. Including the suspension bar and link, each decoration measures 1.6in (41mm) by 1.4in (36mm) and weighs about 1oz (27g). The front shows the Crown of St Edward (aka the Coronation Crown) surmounted by a male lion – both of which are long-established symbols of the British Royal Family. Beneath it is Victoria's suggested inscription "For Valour". The decoration is suspended by a ring attached to a seriffed letter "V" – a typeface dating from antiquity commonly associated with stability and tradition. This hangs from a suspension bar decorated with laurel leaves, a symbol of victory with its roots in Ancient Greece.

The manufacture of the VC hasn't changed much since the first medals were created back in 1857. The work is still undertaken by Hancocks, with each award sand-cast at high temperatures – a process that allows a more detailed finish. Each one is then hand-chased (or embossed) and chemically treated to give the metal its distinct colour. The medals also tend to be produced in batches of 12, ensuring that there is always a stock of them ready to be handed out. Not that each medal is the same. On the reverse of the award is an embossed circle, the centre of which is engraved with the date of the act for which the VC has been awarded. The rear of the suspension bar, meanwhile, is engraved with the name, rank, number and unit of its recipient. These features ensure the uniqueness of every VC produced.

Everything about the VC's design is deliberate. It is intended to represent imperial power and champion traditional monarchial values. But it is also an attempt to harness the modern forces of egalitarianism and democracy, of which the Victorian establishment would have been both aware and wary.

***Below:** Purportedly metal from a Chinese cannon was used for some VCs, but X-rays show various metal used in others*

***Bottom:** VCs tend to be produced in batches of 12*





Images: Alamy, Getty

PROTOCOLS & PRECEDENTS

How the Victoria Cross has evolved over time in looks and eligibility, as well as in the way that it's worn





The Victoria Cross officially came into being when Queen Victoria signed its royal warrant on 29 January 1856. The document was essentially an instruction manual designed to clarify the nature of the award and its presentation. It has been amended and streamlined over the years, with one of the most significant changes coming after the founding of the Royal Air Force during the First World War. The second of the 'rules' listed in the original warrant stated that the medal should be "suspended from the left breast by a blue riband for the Navy and a red riband for the Army". On 22 May 1920, however, King George V signed a warrant that stipulated that all VCs would have the same red ribbon irrespective of which force the recipient was serving in.

The Royal Navy had long been associated with the colour blue. In 1749, it adopted dark (or navy) blue uniforms for what would appear to have been entirely practical reasons. The newly manufactured uniforms were dyed with a plant called indigofera tinctoria, which

***Above:** VC with a Royal Navy blue ribbon, awarded to Able-Seaman William Neilson Edward Hall in 1859*

***Left:** The first posthumous VC was awarded to Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, killed in 1899 in the Second Boer War*



A New Zealand Wars VC from 1864 (left) and a Royal Navy VC from the same year. In 1920 King George V ordered that all VCs should have a red ribbon

the Admiralty had discovered was resistant to Sun and seawater. However, the colour blue has also long been associated with elitism, a fact that wouldn't have been lost on the chiefs of the so-called senior service. The Order of The Garter, for example, dates back to 1348 and is the most senior order of knighthood in the British honours system. One of its anachronistic traditions involves the wearing of a blue strap (or garter) above the left knee. George V's decision to ditch the VC's blue ribbon and standardise it to red can, therefore, be seen as perhaps another nod to egalitarianism. However, as the 'red' used in the 1.5in-wide (38mm) strip is closer to a crimson – a colour closely associated with Britain's royalty – it simultaneously taps into monarchical tradition, too.

The original warrant also made no provision for posthumous awards – something that today the VC is famed for. Originally, awards were only given to those who'd performed an act of gallantry and had lived to tell the tale. One controversial early example of this occurred in May 1857. During the Indian Rebellion, nine soldiers had defended a large ammunition storehouse in Delhi for several hours, blowing it up just before it was overrun. The three men who'd survived the explosion were awarded VCs, while the six who'd been killed were overlooked.

The first posthumous VC was awarded in December 1899, during the Second Boer War. Lieutenant Frederick Roberts was the son of 1st Earl Roberts, a revered British field marshal and royal favourite. Lieutenant Roberts was shot while trying to recover an abandoned artillery piece during a firefight. The recommendation for his VC was rushed through but he died before he could receive it, and he became the first recipient to have the words "since deceased" on his citation. His award caused outrage and in 1907 a further nine posthumous VCs were awarded to men who'd died fighting during both the Second Boer War and the earlier Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

Although there were to be no more backdated medals, posthumous VCs continued to be awarded throughout the First World War, with specific provision made for them in the updated royal warrant of 1920. Of the 627 men who received the medal during that conflict, 159 (approximately 25 per cent) received them posthumously. The Second World War saw that percentage leap to almost 47 percent with 85 of the 181 recipients receiving posthumous awards.

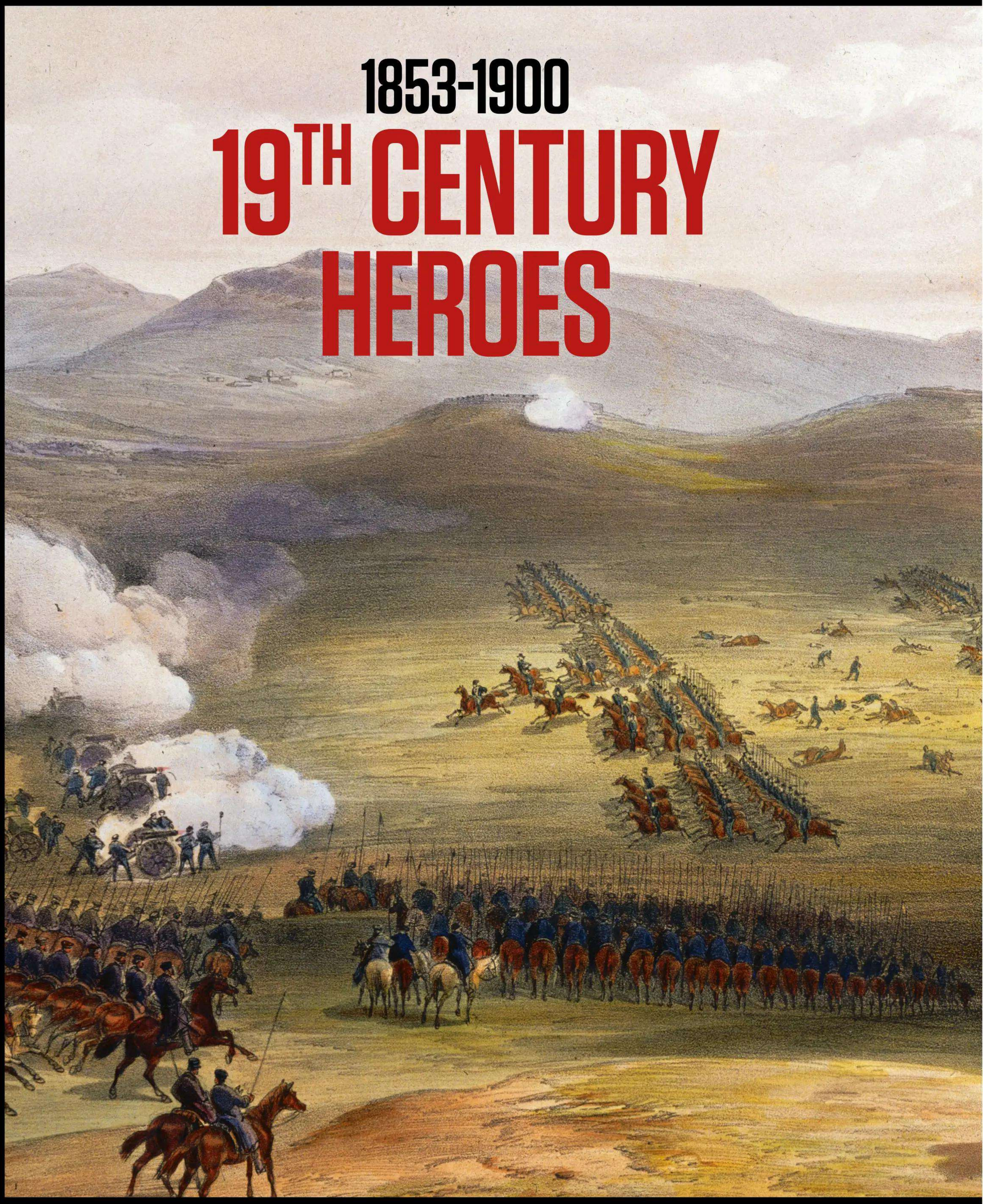
There have been other changes, too, over the years. Although the original warrant stated that the VC should be worn on the left side of the tunic, it didn't stipulate where. In the early days of the award, it was common for recipients to wear it wherever they pleased, with other medals grouped around it. In 1902, however, Edward VII gave the VC its current position as first in line on a bar brooch before any other decorations, effectively elevating it to the highest honour in the land.

A longstanding tradition that hasn't changed is the announcement of a new VC recipient in *The London Gazette*, an official journal of the UK government. This is known as being 'gazetted'. Before it reaches that stage, a recommendation for the award needs to be issued by an officer at regimental level, usually with the support of three witnesses. The recommendation is then passed up the military hierarchy until it reaches the Secretary of State for Defence (or War as it was known until 1964 when it was rebranded). From there it is then presented to the monarch for consideration. If royal approval is granted, the ruling king or queen will present the award. Although there is no official requirement to do so, tradition also dictates that a VC recipient be saluted by other service personnel, regardless of rank. Even chiefs of staff have been known to salute private soldiers wearing a VC, further underscoring the award's egalitarian nature.

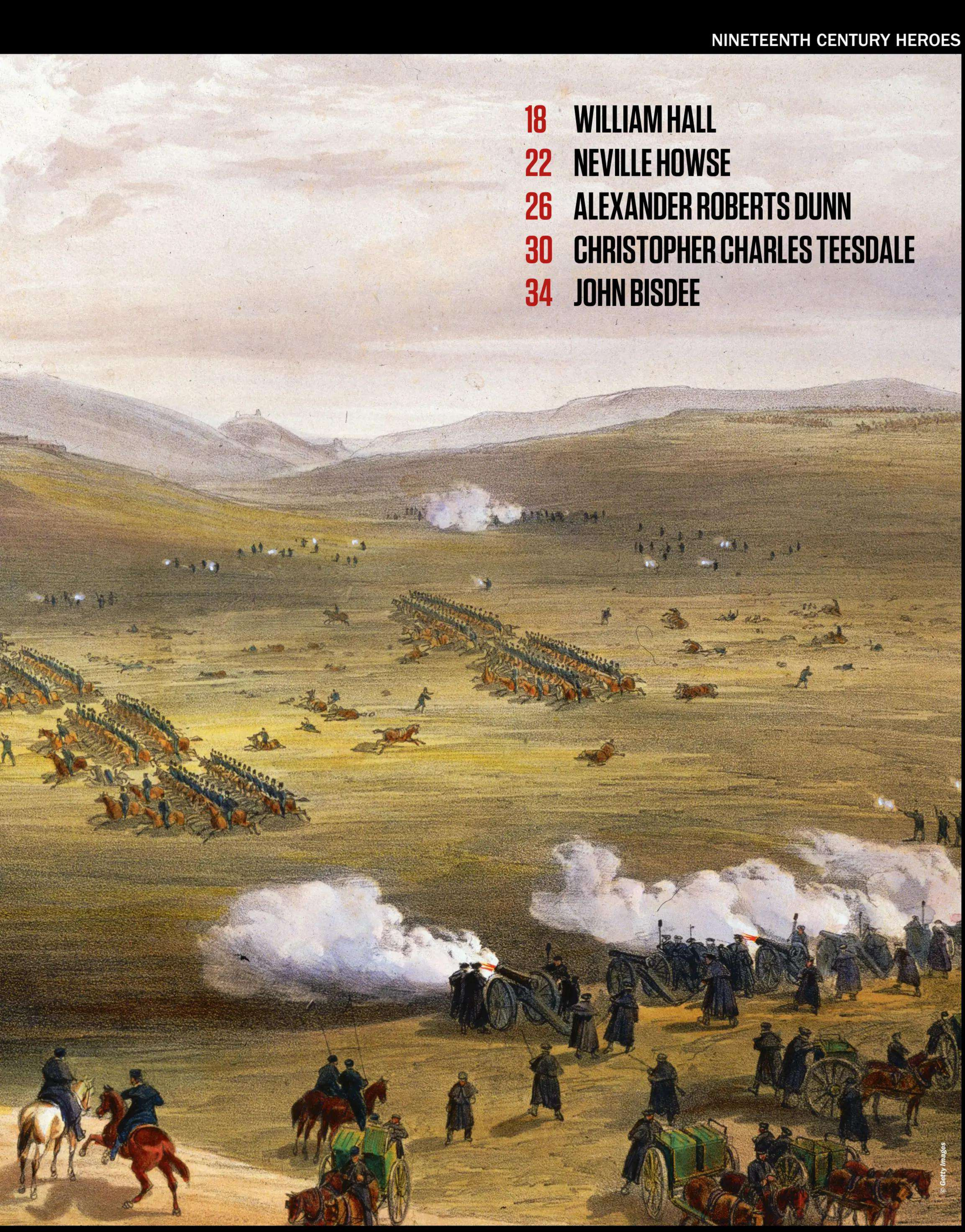
Images: Alamy, Getty

1853-1900

19TH CENTURY HEROES



18 WILLIAM HALL
22 NEVILLE HOWSE
26 ALEXANDER ROBERTS DUNN
30 CHRISTOPHER CHARLES TEESDALE
34 JOHN BISDEE



© Getty Images



WILLIAM HALL

Hall holds the distinction of being the first black man, the first Nova Scotian, and third Canadian to win the VC for doggedly clinging to his gun in 1857

WORDS **FRANK JASTRZEMBSKI**

William Hall's mother and father, both born into servitude, fled from the United States in the early 19th century, crossing into Canada and forging a new beginning in Nova Scotia. Hall was born a free citizen on 25 April 1829, escaping a life of bondage. Having been raised on the maritime coast, Hall worked as a merchant for a short stint before crossing into the United States and arriving at Boston, enlisting in the United States Navy in 1847. Under the alias of William Harvey, the black Nova Scotian served aboard both the USS *Franklin* and the USS *Savannah*, concluding his American naval service with the USS *Ohio* in June 1849.

Hall journeyed to London to enlist in the Royal Navy in 1852, entering service aboard the HMS *Rodney*. One year later, war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, leading to an Anglo-French expeditionary force being dispatched to the Crimea.

Hall was one of the sailors to come ashore and act as artillerymen or foot soldier in the Royal Naval Brigade under the overall command of the battle-hardened Captain Stephen Lushington. Hall fought at the Battle of Inkerman, also serving in the trenches during the siege of Sevastopol. For his role in these operations, Hall earned the Turkish Medal and the Crimean Medal (Inkerman and Sebastopol clasps were added to the medal for his role in these engagements).

Shortly after the war ended in 1856, Hall transferred to the 2,667-ton, 51-gun steam frigate, the HMS *Shannon*, commanded by the daring Captain Sir William Peel, who had earned immortality in the navy (and a VC) for his gutsy performance during the Crimean War. The HMS *Shannon* left England for China on March 17, 1857, dispatched to protect British economic interests amid the civil war being fought between the Manchu rulers and the Taiping rebels. While in transit, dreadful news arrived reporting the spread of mutiny among the sepoys in India. Lord Elgin, in command of the expedition on its way to China, dispatched three warships from Singapore – the HMS *Sanspariel*, HMS *Shannon* and the HMS *Pearl* – to Calcutta to lend support.

The HMS *Shannon* steamed up the mouth of the Ganges River and reached Calcutta on 29 August. Hall joined hundreds of sailors pulled from the HMS *Shannon* to act as ground troops and artillerymen in a hastily assembled naval brigade placed under the command of its captain. The sailors unloaded and hauled with them six 68-pounders, two eight-inch howitzers, eight 24-pounders, two small guns and eight rockets. Sporting white jackets with matching trousers, accompanied by a black handkerchief tied around the neck and straw hats, their uniforms set them apart from the other British lands units, largely clothed in scarlet and khaki. The sailors' expertise in operating these naval guns would be instrumental in the coming weeks.

"HALL, WITH UTTER DISREGARD FOR LIFE, KEPT LOADING AND FIRING THE GUN UNTIL THE WALL HAD BEEN BREACHED AND THE RELIEF OF LUCKNOW HAD BEEN ASSURED"

Peel's undersized naval brigade moved overland first to Allahabad, arriving on 14 August, and then marching to Cawnpore on 28 October. The sailors merged with two companies of the 53rd Regiment, one company of the 93rd Highlanders, a detachment of Royal Engineers, and an assorted company of various units. Under the overall command of Lieutenant-Colonel Powell, this 700-man column fought and defeated 2,000 mutineers at Kudjna (Kajwa) on 1 November (Powell was shot through the head and killed, leaving Peel in command of the column). After sweeping this opposition aside, Powell's (Peel's) column united with Sir Colin Campbell's command, advancing in an effort to break through the city of Lucknow and relieve the defenders boxed in at the British Residency.

Campbell's relief column reached the outskirts of Lucknow on 14 November. Instead of driving his way through the centre of the city and risking heavy casualties, Campbell opted swing to its right and advance adjacent to the winding Gomti River. Two days after their arrival, Campbell's column pushed down a road that led to the Lucknow Residency and encountered the Sikandar Bagh, a walled garden and villa. After successfully overrunning this obstacle, Campbell next directed his attention on Shah Najaf. Described as "One of the stoutest defences of the mutineers around Lucknow," the domed mosque built over the tomb of Ghazi-ud-Din Haidar Shah sat in the centre of a garden, enclosed by a 20 foot-high stone wall

William Hall, VC [Courtesy of the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries, Oxford, Ohio].



"WE ALL EXPECTED GREAT THINGS OF THAT GUN, FROM THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF [COLIN CAMPBELL], DOWNWARDS... "

"HALL CONTINUED SPONGING AND LOADING AFTER ALL THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GUNS' CREW WERE SHOT DOWN"

Sepoy mutineers attacking the redan battery at Lucknow, India on 30 July 1857

guarding its perimeter. The mutineers defending this structure also had the protection of a parapet and sandbags piled high on the outer walls to further beef up its defences.

It was nearly 2:30pm, and Campbell wanted to maintain the successful momentum of the day and secure Shah Najaf before nightfall. Campbell ordered Captain Peel's 24-pounders of the Naval Brigade and Captain Middleton's battery of the Royal Artillery to get as close as possible to wreak havoc on the soft targets and puncture the outer wall. Peel's 24-pounders worked "with redoubled energy" at this lethal range, unleashing a barrage of grape at the southern and eastern parapets. Hall, working with one of these six-man gun crews, remembered rapidly loading and firing off one round after another, the sailors swiftly lugging their guns forward in a repetitive sequence between each shot. This continued until the guns ended up so close to the outer walls that Hall feared being hit by "brick and stone torn by the round shot from the walls we were bombarding."

The charismatic Campbell, mounted on a conspicuous white charger, yanked his sword from its sheath and personally led the 93rd Highlanders to follow close behind the guns. The 93rd had no scaling ladders on hand. They could only idly wait until either Peel's 24-pounders or Middleton's battery breached the stone wall. Meanwhile, the Scotsmen kneeled behind the mud huts of a village positioned directly outside the eastern wall of Shah Najaf, waiting for the order from Campbell to surge forward. The thatched roofs offered little resistance to enemy gunfire, and stray bullets easily shredded through the roofs and cut into the flesh of the infantrymen.

Not having much success shattering a hole in the wall with his artillery fire, Captain Peel ordered Lt Thomas James Young's single gun dragged to within the 12-15 paces of the wall. The sailors assigned to this suicidal task, including Hall, were exposed to withering gunfire, accompanied by exploding hand grenades filled with gunpowder and bits of iron tossed down at them by the mutineers on the walls. One witness remembered that the enemy bullets smacking against the gun itself made a noise "that which a crowd of schoolboys might make throwing stones at an empty saucepan." Everything was riding on the efforts of this single gun.

Decimated by enemy gunfire, most of the sailors of the gun crumbled to the ground either dead or wounded as they struggled to batter a hole in the wall. As bullets ricocheted off the gun and balls cut through the air, Hall clutched his ramrod and stuck to his post, refusing to allow the gun to fall silent. With his sleeves shoved up his arms, he continued to do the work of two or three men on the gun with machinelike precision. Lieutenant Nowell Salmon, who was awarded a VC that same day for climbing a tree and picking off mutineers trying to silence the lone gun, remembered Hall being "as steady as a rock under fire." Lt Young and Hall miraculously kept the single gun blazing away, despite being the most conspicuous targets on the field.

On the verge of ordering his men to retire, with nightfall fast approaching, Campbell received word that the wall had been breached. He immediately ordered his men forward with fixed bayonets to rush it. Most attribute this breach shot coming from Hall's gun, while some reasoned it could be attributed to the efforts of the other guns or to natural corrosion. Regardless of what caused it, the 93rd Highlanders poured into the mosque's courtyard while the enemy fled out of the rear gate. The successful occupation of Shah Najaf led to Campbell linking up with those trapped at the Residency the next day.

Captain Peel, moved by Hall's selfless heroism during the battle, recommended the humble seaman for the VC. Hall received this honour on 1 February 1859, making him the first black man to receive the empire's highest honor for valour. Along with the medal, Hall continued to receive a pension of £10 a year until his death. He also received the Indian Mutiny Medal for his service. He continued in the service of the Royal Navy until he retired in July 1876.

Hall settled on a small farm in Nova Scotia after his retirement. He lived with and supported two of his sisters, remaining a lifelong bachelor. A journalist by the name of DV Warner, eager to meet the hero of Shah Najaf, paid a visit to Hall's farm in 1901. He found the grizzled hero at work sharpening a scythe.

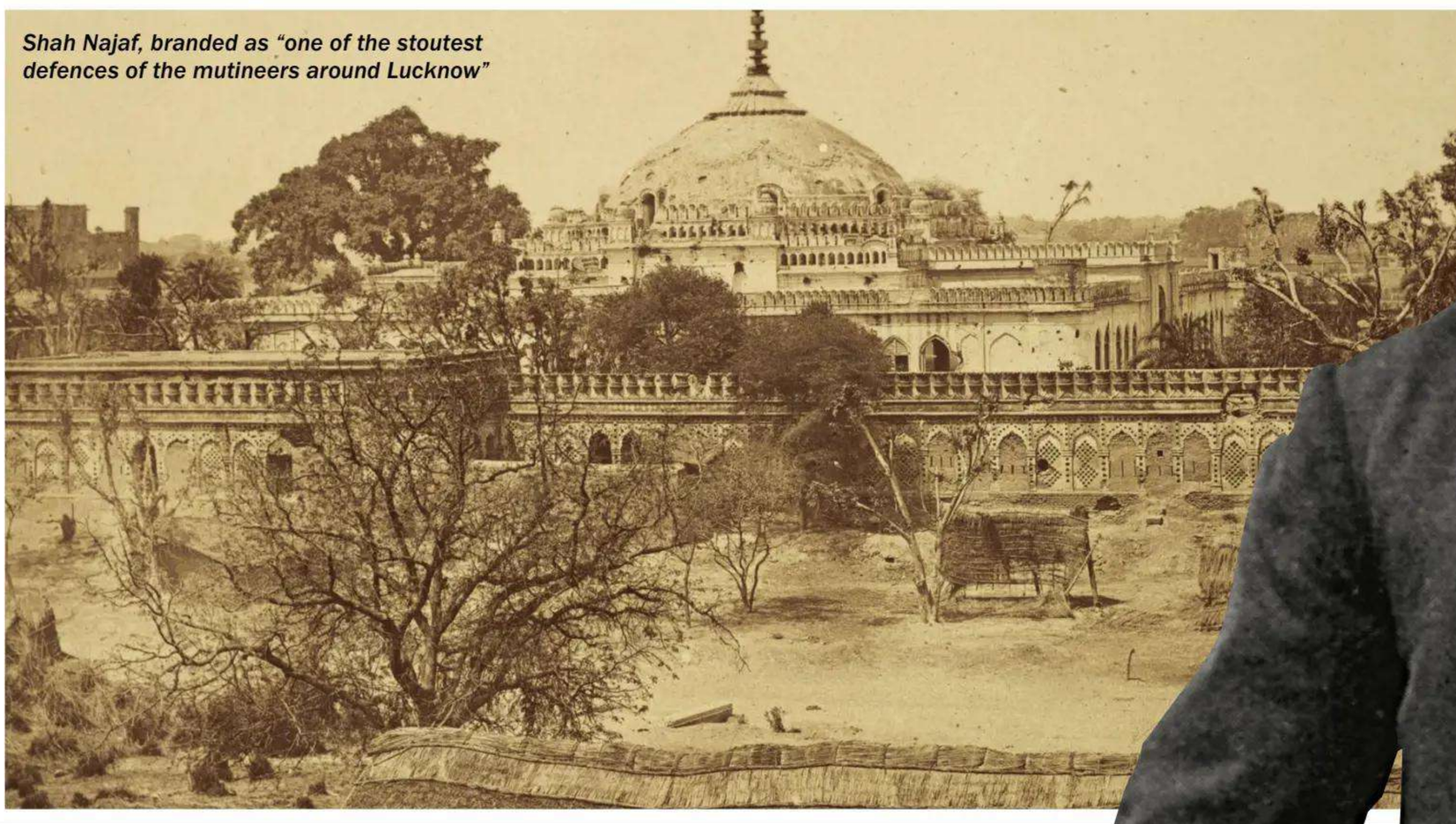
Hall invited Warner inside his home after a brief introduction, thanking him "for taking note of me." He reached up and grabbed a cardboard spool box from his mantle, dumping the contents on an adjacent table. Clanking against the wood fell a collection of medals, including his VC. Warner mentioned how many men in Her Majesty's empire would have died for this honour (and who had already done so trying to obtain it). Hall gave his visitor a modest response, a trademark of his temperament: "Well, it isn't worth very much to a man after, all, only ten pounds a year. If it wasn't for my regular navy pension of forty pounds a year besides, I don't know how we'd get along here. The farm is small, and my two sisters live with me, you know."

Hall traveled to Halifax to take part in a parade during the visit of Prince George (King George V) in October 1901. This proud black-Canadian with so many medals dangling from his breast caught the attention of the young prince. For a few moments, Hall and Prince George casually shared a few words.

William Hall died at his home three years after Warner's visit and his chance meeting with Prince George on 25 August 1904. Buried in an unmarked grave, in 1954 Hall's remains were removed and re-interred underneath a stone cairn with a bronze plate commemorating his gallant deed.



***Right:** Lieutenant (later Admiral) Nowell Salmon, V.C. "He [Hall] was a fine powerful man and as steady as a rock under fire"*



Shah Najaf, branded as "one of the stoutest defences of the mutineers around Lucknow"

Images: Alamy



NEVILLE HOWSE

During a fighting retreat at Vredefort, in the Orange Free State, this medical officer rescued a severely wounded man and carried him to safety, despite fierce enemy fire

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

The son of a Crimean war veteran and doctor, Neville Reginald Howse was born in Stogursey, Somerset, in 1863. Qualifying as a doctor in 1886, he migrated to Australia in 1889 for health reasons ('weak lungs') and set up his own medical practice in the New South Wales (NSW) city of Newcastle, then in the town of Taree. Deciding to become a surgeon, he returned to Britain to attend the Royal College and returned to Australia in 1899, setting up a practice in the central NSW town of Orange. When Britain declared war on the Boer Republics in October 1899, launching the Second Boer War, Howse volunteered for military service with the second contingent, New South Wales Army Medical Corps. Commissioned as a lieutenant, he departed for South Africa on 17 January, arriving in Capetown on 18 February. He contracted typhoid and was hospitalised for eight weeks.

In May, fighting near Doornkop, about seven miles (11km) west of Johannesburg, a recovered Howse was mentioned in dispatches for his work treating casualties in the field. Two months later he was attached to a column of the 4th Brigade of Mounted Infantry commanded by General Ian Hamilton under Brigadier-General Charles Parker Ridley, chasing the Boer general, Christiaan de Wet.

De Wet had served as a field cornet in the First Boer War (fighting in the victory at the battle of Majuba Hill in 1881). In the Second Boer War he had participated in several of the early Boer successes, participating first as a burgher without rank in the Heilbron Commando but rapidly gaining promotion to the highest commands. He participated in the Battle of Ladysmith at Nicholson's Nek in October 1899, which saw the surrender of 954 British men and officers. He then participated in the Siege of Ladysmith and was made General Piet Cronjé's second-in-command in December.

When the British advance began in February 1900, De Wet's men raided and harassed the advance. De Wet was made commander-in-chief of the Free State Forces in March 1900 after the surrender of Cronjé at the Battle of Paardeberg on 27 February. Despite being relentlessly hunted by his enemy, De Wet continued to evade the British, mounting several successful raids and conducting copy-book guerrilla warfare. His men also annihilated several isolated British posts and mounted surprise attacks, such as on Sanna's Post near Blomfontein and at Reddersburg.

On the morning of 24 July 1900, at the small hamlet of Vredefort in the Orange Free State/Orange River Colony (Britain's name for the occupied territory), Ridley's column caught up with the rear of De Wet's. Rather than make their escape as was usual, De Wet's men turned and counter-attacked ferociously. Ridley's men were forced to withdraw due to the weight of fire coming from the Boers. The Boers pressed their attack and the British troops were forced to withdraw a second time. As the bugler rose to sound the retreat, he was

***Below:** Afrikaner soldiers were equipped with modern rifles in the Second Boer War, inflicting many casualties*



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"GIVING AND DISREGARDING ORDERS IN A MANNER QUITE SHOCKING BUT STRANGELY PRODUCTIVE OF RESULTS. SHELLS AND BULLETS HE COMPLETELY DISREGARDED... TO THE WOUNDED HE WAS GENTLENESS ITSELF"

Chief-of-Staff Colonel (Sir) Brudenell White praises Howse's actions on Gallipoli beach in April 1915



shot in the stomach. Despite heavy enemy fire, Howse immediately mounted a horse and rode to the bugler's assistance. Dismounting to tend the man's injuries (he had been shot through the bladder), he dressed his wound. In the meantime, however, Howse's horse was killed. Despite the intensifying cross-fire, Howse raised the man up and carried him on his back to safety behind the line of Ridley's men. There he immediately went to work to sew up the man's punctured bladder.

Despite the concerted efforts of British commanders to capture him, De Wet would continue to evade British forces until the end of the war. He eventually took part in the peace negotiations, standing in for indisposed Orange Free State President Marthinus Steyn, and was a signatory on the Treaty of Vereeniging on 31 May 1902, which ended the war.

Soon after his action at Vredefort, Howse was captured by the Boers but released as a non-combatant. He was promoted to captain in October, and then invalided to Britain in November 1900 due to ill-health (something which would plague for the rest of his career). He therefore did not return to Australia with his contingent which left South Africa in December 1900. After recovery in England, in February 1901 Howse travelled back to Australia. It was there that he learned of his Victoria Cross (VC) award (which was gazetted in June 1901 – the entry is brief indeed) even though his citation incorrectly names him House. He was

"ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING AUSTRALIANS OF THE GREAT WAR... ONE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE AND SELF-SACRIFICING MEDICAL ADMINISTRATORS ANY MILITARY FORCE HAS EVER KNOWN"

Fellow AAMC officer Colonel RM Downes

presented his medal in Sydney in December 1901 at Victoria Barracks, the first Australian to be awarded the VC (he remains the only Australian medical officer recipient). Present at the investiture were two recipients of the VC who had subsequently moved to NSW. Both men had been awarded the medal for their actions in the Indian Mutiny in 1857 – Alfred Heathcote and John Paton.

Howse returned to South Africa as a Major with the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) in March 1902. By that time (as of January 1 1901) Australia had confederated as a nation so its troops now served under a national banner rather than being contingents from each colony as they had been in 1899 and 1900. Howse was co-commander of the Medical Corps with Major TA Green – Green in charge of the Field Hospital and Howse of the Bearer Company. They arrived in Durban and travelled by rail to Natal then on to Klerksdorp, Western Transvaal, where the field hospital was established. Howse and the Bearer Company were attached to Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry Column led by Colonel AW Thorneycroft of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The unit had served with distinction throughout the war.

Howse once again became seriously ill and was invalided to Britain once more on 6 July – the Australian forces left South Africa for home only two days later. He returned to Australia in November that year, one of only six Australian recipients of the VC in that conflict.

Howse married in 1905 and remained a major in the AAMC Reserve. He was elected mayor of Orange in 1914 but World War I cut short his term. In August that year, and despite being already over 50, he was appointed principal medical officer to the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force to German New Guinea, in particular the island of New Britain on 19 August as a lieutenant-colonel. Probably based on his own experiences, he personally organised the availability of drugs applicable



***Left:** Howse served with a mounted infantry column during the pursuit of General Christiaan de Wet*

to a tropical campaign and to protect against typhoid and smallpox.

He returned to Australia in time to sail with the first convoy of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) to Egypt. In December 1914 he was promoted colonel and made assistant director of medical services in the 1st Australian Division. At Gallipoli in late-April 1915 he personally organised the evacuation of the wounded from the crowded beach under enemy shell fire. He was mentioned in dispatches and appointed Companion of the Bath (CB) in July. He sought to combat venereal disease among the Australian troops and established the Anzac Medical Society to disseminate information among medical personnel.

He was made commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) medical services in September 1915 and then, in November, director of the AIF's medical services as surgeon-general. This ensured that the AAMC was independent from British medical authority and the Royal Army Medical Corps. When the AIF moved to western Europe in 1916, Howse set up his administrative HQ in London but visited the front frequently and maintained control over the AAMC in Egypt, Palestine and France.

In January 1917 he was promoted major-general and appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB). He introduced surgical and resuscitation teams with each division, and reorganised field ambulances into two sections (an idea rejected in 1916 but adopted in 1918).



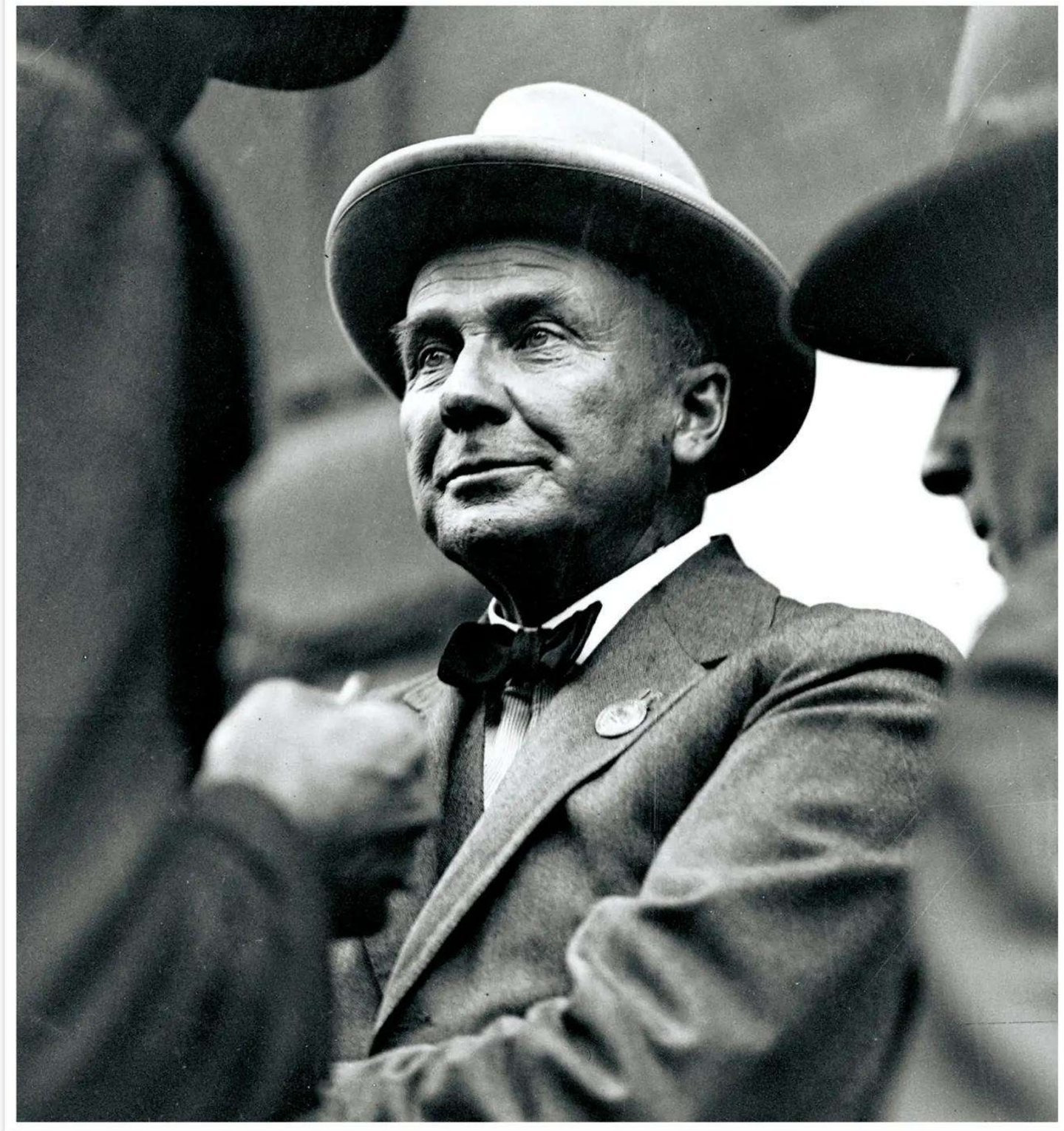
***Above:** Afrikaners pictured during the Second Boer War. Howse served with distinction in the New South Wales Army Medical Corps during the conflict*

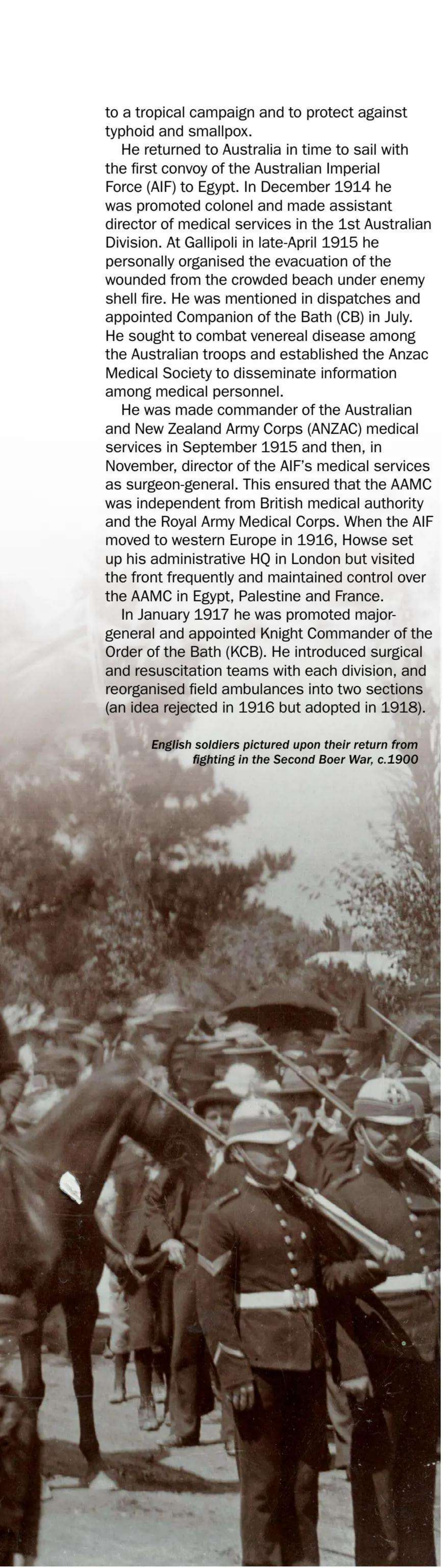
***Below:** Howse in the 1920s during his successful (if brief) political career when, using his vast experience, he served as both Minister for Defence and Health*

As the war drew to a close, Howse advised the Australian government on the return of severely wounded soldiers and medical repatriation.

He was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG), and made a Knight of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1919. Howse returned to Australia in January 1920, where spoke out on the successes of the AAMC in making and keeping the AIF healthy. He was again elected mayor of Orange, in 1921, but once more only served for a short term. He resigned his army commission in November 1922 to become a Member of Parliament. As an MP, he attended the fourth assembly of the League of Nations in 1923. He then served in the government of Prime Minister Stanley Bruce as Minister for Defence and Health and other ministries between 1925 and 1929. He was ahead of his time, seeking to improve public health and promoting maternity allowances and the welfare of returned servicemen. He was a pioneer in the treatment of venereal disease and cancer, setting up one of the world's first radium banks in Australia in 1928. He lost his seat in the 1929 election and travelled to England for cancer treatment in February 1930 but died in London in September that year.

For the centenary of his bravery, he was depicted on a one dollar coin and a postage stamp in Australia, and a sculpture was commissioned for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, an institution he founded in 1927.





English soldiers pictured upon their return from fighting in the Second Boer War, c.1900

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ALEXANDER ROBERTS DUNN

On a cold October morning in 1854, as the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade crumbled near Balaklava, this dashing cavalryman saved two of his comrades to become Canada's first Victoria Cross recipient

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The trumpet call rang out across the Valley of Death, its shrill and ominous sound an order to advance towards the enemy. Horses lurched forward, hastened by the roughly 670 mounted men of the Light Brigade, as a cloud of frosted breath filled the air.

Alexander Roberts Dunn, a Canadian lieutenant with the 11th Hussars made up part of the second line of attack. His oversized sword scabbard brushed against his thigh with every stride of his mount, as he followed the first ranks of cavalrymen in their advance across the open ground. He glanced at his comrades around him — all wore the same forlorn expression, the faces of those who knew they were almost certainly embarking on a suicide mission. A terrible mistake had been made, one that would ring through the annals of history like the trumpeter's haunting notes to charge. But for Dunn, at least, the events that were about to unfold, specifically the actions he was about to take, would shed a beacon of light on one of the darkest days for the British Army.

It had been a day that started with news that the Russians, hoping to disrupt Allied preparations and relieve pressure on the Siege of Sevastopol, had advanced towards the British base at Balaklava. Under General Pavel Liprandi, the enemy force numbered 25,000 infantry, 34 squadrons of cavalry and 78 guns. They had subsequently overrun the Turkish positions on a low ridge of hills called the Causeway Heights, taking Allied cannons and advancing into the South Valley before being repulsed by the 93rd Highland Regiment (dubbed the 'Thin Red Line'). An 800-strong charge of the British Heavy Brigade had followed, pushing the Russians back into the North Valley. However, the Allies' luck ended there: not long after, Liprandi's men cemented their footing on the Causeway Heights,



bolstered its captured artillery redoubts, and set up their own redoubts on the opposite side of the North Valley atop the Fedioukine Hills. They then further established themselves at the eastern end of the valley with a dozen-gun battery, effectively sealing it off with a U-shaped wall of firepower.

British Field Marshal Lord Raglan, a rusty 65-year-old veteran who hadn't fought since Waterloo some 40 years earlier, had watched the bloody skirmishes unfold from a lookout on the Sapouné Ridge, approximately 200 metres above the plain. Increasingly concerned that the Russians were removing the seized artillery, he had issued his notoriously ambiguous order to the commander of the Cavalry Division: "The cavalry [will] advance rapidly to the front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy from carrying away the guns." Raglan's aide-de-camp, the hot-headed Captain Lewis Nolan, had been tasked with carrying the message to Lieutenant-General Lucan in the west end of the North Valley, which was received with puzzlement. Lucan, his camp situated on the low ground, could see only the 12 Russian guns directed at his men and protected by several squadrons of enemy cavalry on the other side of the valley;

This iconic painting by John Charlton depicts the close-quarters fighting as the British charged the Russian guns during the Battle of Balaklava

“DUNN FENDED OFF THE ENEMY BLADES, DRAWING THE FULL FURY OF THEIR ATTENTION AGAINST HIM, ALLOWING TIME FOR BENTLEY TO GET TO HIS FEET”

Sergeant-Major Lloyd Smith

© Alamy

Dunn was a natural equestrian, skilled marksman and lethal with a sword. He cultivated a disciplinarian image but was respected by his men

those atop of the Causeway Heights, which Raglan intended him to engage, were out of his field of vision. With few clear instructions provided by Nolan, who reportedly pointed vaguely in the direction of the artillery ahead, it was thus that the fateful decision was taken for the Light Brigade to advance on the heavily defended positions immediately in front.

As the men advanced the Russian guns opened fire, leaving in their wake a scattering of mangled corpses as the surviving horses pushed on. Wounded soldiers were trampled underfoot in the desperate struggle that ensued, and all the while the cannons tore into the ranks from three sides. Dunn, his towering frame of 190cm making for a fearsome sight in the saddle, his blond walrus-like moustache catching the wind while he rode, wielded his custom-made 1.2-metre sabre (much longer than regulation length to accommodate his size) at the ready. He and the other 80 mounted members of the 11th Hussars, along with the other units involved in the charge, were filled with rage. Finally, after ten minutes of charging into the point-blank bombardment, the Light Brigade reached the enemy. British swords were free to hack at the Russian artillerymen and all who stood in their path. In the ensuing melee the defenders were pushed as far back as the Chernaya River, but without Allied infantry support it soon became apparent that the Light Brigade needed to retreat. Except now a contingent of Russian cavalry was there to challenge the withdrawal.

Dunn and what was left of his regiment gathered and made one final dash to break free of the enemy spears. Admired as a natural equestrian, the 21-year-old Canadian escaped unscathed, though several stragglers behind him were quickly encircled. Among them was Sergeant Robert Bentley, who was knocked from his saddle by three Russian dragoons. Dunn could have turned a blind eye, but instead he turned his horse and dug in his spurs. Another cavalryman, Sergeant-Major Lloyd Smith, saw what happened next: "Dunn fended off the enemy blades, drawing the full fury of their attention against him, allowing time for Bentley to get to his feet. Employing his huge sword, Lieutenant Dunn parried and slashed with effortless strength, and cut down the first dragoon out of his saddle. Although Dunn's horse became almost unmanageable, he and the remaining Russians hacked and circled around until he killed them both." Having saved one comrade, Dunn went on to rescue another of his men, Private Levett, who was also being attacked by a Russian. Dunn's swordsmanship, like his riding skills, was renowned, and the enemy was promptly dispatched. Levett was nevertheless killed minutes later.

"HAVING IN THE LIGHT CAVALRY CHARGE ON THE 25TH OCTOBER, 1854, SAVED THE LIFE OF SERGEANT BENTLEY... BY CUTTING DOWN TWO OR THREE RUSSIAN[S]... AND AFTERWARDS CUTTING DOWN A RUSSIAN HUSSAR... ATTACKING PRIVATE LEVETT"

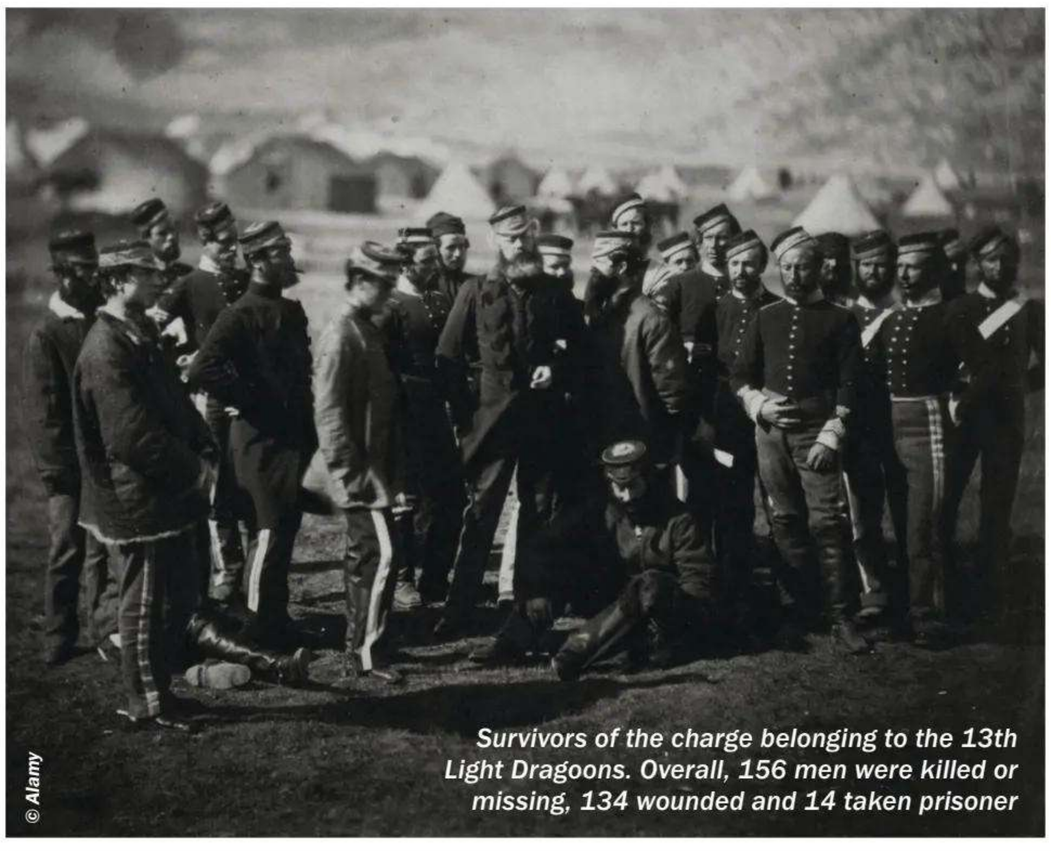
Alexander Dunn's VC citation

Yet no one could deny that Dunn had showcased exceptional valour in a moment of extreme peril. While the Charge of the Light Brigade had led to 156 men killed or missing, 134 wounded and 14 taken prisoner (as well as a death toll of 475 out of 670 horses), there was at least one less casualty due to Dunn's skill and bravery. Many of the 25 survivors of the 11th Hussars had witnessed his heroics, and voted unanimously that he should receive a gallantry award.

It would take some years for such a medal to be pinned to his left breast pocket, during which time Dunn served in the Siege of Sevastopol and the Battle of Inkerman before running away with none other than his commander's wife. He resigned his army commission and eloped with his lover to Canada, where they lived together on his family estate in York (present-day Toronto). Then, in 1857, Dunn received word that he along with 62 other soldiers had been selected as one of the first veterans to receive the newly created Victoria Cross.

His citation recognised his "…having in the Light Cavalry charge on the 25th October, 1854, saved the life of Sergeant Bentley… by cutting down two or three Russian[s]… and afterwards cutting down a Russian Hussar… attacking Private Levett…" Queen Victoria

The 11th Hussars, situated in the second line on the left flank, attempt to attack the heavily defended Russian positions – with disastrous consequences



© Alamy

Survivors of the charge belonging to the 13th Light Dragoons. Overall, 156 men were killed or missing, 134 wounded and 14 taken prisoner



© Getty

A Canadian peacekeeping force was stationed in the Eritrean town of Senafe (pictured) in the early 2000s and found Alexander Roberts Dunn's gravesite there

herself presided over the illustrious ceremony in London's Hyde Park, placing the decoration – cast in bronze from a Russian cannon – on his royal blue hussar jacket. Prior to returning to Canada, he was successfully persuaded to re-join the army as a major, whereby he helped raise the 100th Regiment (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian).

In 1864, Dunn was promoted again and became the first Canadian to command a regiment and the youngest colonel in the British Army. However, his insatiable hunger for adventure would, in time, be his downfall after transferring to the 33rd Regiment (The Duke of Wellington's Own) and participating in the British Expedition to Abyssinia, where he met his mysterious demise.

The military coroner's official account is that during a hunting expedition Dunn was sitting on a rock, attempting to uncork a brandy flask, when his rifle slipped and discharged into his chest. Others speculated that foul play was involved. Dunn was a notorious womaniser and one theory is that someone in his unit, perhaps a jealous husband, exacted revenge upon him. Another suggestion is that Dunn's former mistress, having been written out of his will, hired his valet as an assassin. Finally, there is the possibility that 'survivor's guilt' following the Charge of the Light Brigade drove him to suicide. Regardless of the truth, he was buried in present-day Eritrea and largely forgotten about until the end of the Second World War, when a British soldier discovered his grave. It turned out that occupying Italian forces, despite being on opposing sides to the British, had taken it upon themselves to clean and tend to Dunn's final resting place. Unfortunately, though, his grave was again forgotten about and neglected for half a century until a Canadian peacekeeping mission discovered it and once more restored it to its former glory. In Canada itself, meanwhile, several memorials have been erected in Dunn's honour.



CHRISTOPHER CHARLES TEESDALE

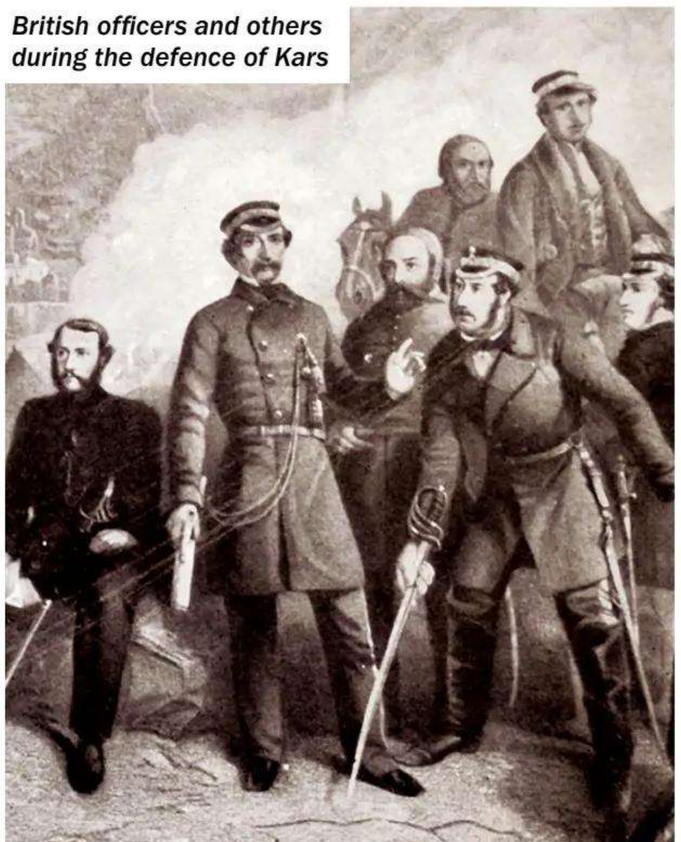
During the 1855 Siege of Kars, this young officer risked his life to save the lives of his enemy during the last major operation of the Crimean War

WORDS **MARK SIMNER**

Christopher Charles Teesdale entered the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, London, in 1848 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Royal Artillery in 1851. The following year Teesdale went to Corfu, where he was promoted to first lieutenant in 1853. In 1854 he was appointed aide-de-camp to Colonel William Fenwick Williams, who at the time was the British commissioner with the Turkish army in Asia Minor during the Crimean War.

The same year, Teesdale accompanied Williams to Erzurum, from where they travelled to Kars, reaching the city on 24 September. Williams later returned to Erzurum, leaving Teesdale with the unenviable task of organising and establishing discipline among the poorly trained Turkish garrison. He worked ceaselessly to ensure the welfare of his men, and with his task largely complete by March the following year Teesdale rejoined Williams at Erzurum. He was made a major in the Turkish army and received a letter from the Foreign Office in London commending his strenuous efforts at Kars, which it was believed helped avoid a repetition of the previous year's famine that had ravaged the garrison.

Alarming news arrived on 1 June 1855, when a messenger informed Williams that a large Russian force had assembled at Gumri with the intention of advancing on Kars. Williams and Teesdale immediately set off for the city, arriving on 7 June. Several days later, Teesdale went up to the Tahmasp batteries, from where, on 12 June, he conducted a reconnaissance of the Russian camp that had been established nearby. The Russian army advancing on Kars was estimated to be 25,000-strong. On the morning of the 16th, the Russians launched an attack but were driven off by Turkish artillery fire. Unable to take the city as quickly as they had hoped, the Russians decided to lay siege to Kars, although a second attack was mounted on 7 August, which was also beaten off by the defenders.



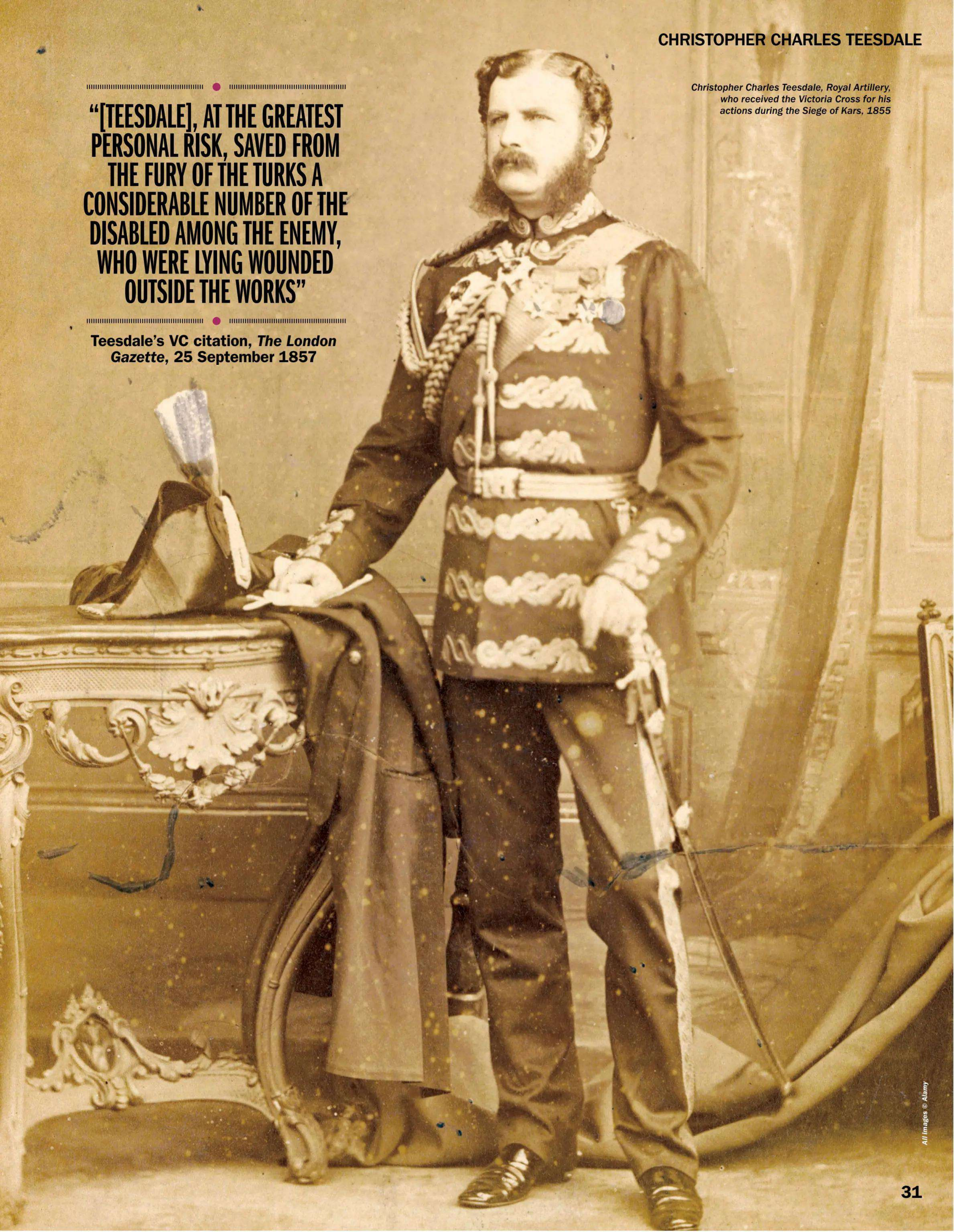
British officers and others during the defence of Kars

During late August and into early September, Teesdale was actively engaged in harassing Russian Cossacks and launching small attacks on Russian cavalry forces near the city. Unfortunately for the garrison, the weather began to change for the worse and much-needed supplies were being used up at an alarming rate. To compound matters, cholera broke out and the demoralised Turkish troops began to desert.

On 1 September Wilson noted how desperate the situation in the city was becoming: "The most is made of our provisions; the soldiers are reduced to half allowances of bread and meat or rice-butter. Sometimes 100 drachmas of biscuit instead of bread; nothing besides. No money. Musselman population, 3,000 rifles, will soon be reduced to starvation. Armenians are ordered to quit the town to-morrow. No barley, scarcely any forage. Cavalry reduced to walking skeletons, and sent out of garrison; artillery horses soon the same."

"[TEESDALE], AT THE GREATEST PERSONAL RISK, SAVED FROM THE FURY OF THE TURKS A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF THE DISABLED AMONG THE ENEMY, WHO WERE LYING WOUNDED OUTSIDE THE WORKS"

Teesdale's VC citation, *The London Gazette*, 25 September 1857



Christopher Charles Teesdale, Royal Artillery, who received the Victoria Cross for his actions during the Siege of Kars, 1855

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General Nikolay Muravyov, commanding the besieging Russian army, was concerned Ottoman forces would make a move on Kutaisi and Tiflis, which would cut his supply lines to Kars. He therefore decided to launch a large scale and rapid assault against the city before it was too late, despite not yet having worked out the weak points in Kars' defences and his troops being still unfamiliar with the terrain. Nevertheless, given the threat Muravyov felt he had little choice.

On the morning of 23 September, the Russians launched an attack on the city. However, they were again repulsed by the weakened but still determined defenders. The siege continued with smaller but regular sorties being made against the outer defences of Kars. Six days later, Teesdale volunteered to take command of the men who had been holding the most advanced part of the city's defences. This position was a key point in the defences, which the Russians finally attacked in force on the 29th.

Muravyov's renewed assault was supposed to be a night attack, but a group of Russian soldiers got lost in the dark and the main attack was postponed until the morning. Attacking in columns, the Russians suffered heavily in the face of brutal Turkish small arms fire. Nevertheless, some Russian troops were able to penetrate one of the redoubts.

"...BY THROWING HIMSELF INTO THE MIDST OF THE ENEMY... HE ENCOURAGED THE GARRISON TO MAKE AN ATTACK, SO VIGOROUS, AS TO DRIVE OUT THE RUSSIANS THEREFROM, AND PREVENT ITS CAPTURE"

Teesdale's VC Citation, *The London Gazette*, 25 September 1857

Teesdale now threw himself into the fight, encouraging the Turkish soldiers to counterattack and drive the Russians out of the redoubt. According to Teesdale: "I rushed up into the salient already occupied by the enemy. This sudden impulse saved us. Those who had already penetrated were in a moment struck down on the platform where I stood and their gallant leader – as he was about to cross sword with mine – received a ball in the centre of his forehead and fell backwards into the ditch."

Despite Teesdale's efforts, the Russians were able to drive off some Turkish artillerymen, who abandoned their guns under a murderous fire. He moved again to the fore and managed to rally the gunners, and by his intrepid example persuaded them to return to their posts and bring their vital guns back into action.

Later, Teesdale led a charge at some enemy stragglers but was unexpectedly confronted by a strong Russian regiment. "The Turks still left alive in Tachmash tabia could no longer be restrained," he recalled. "Seeing our plight they burst forth like a pent-up torrent from the redoubt and rushed with the blind fury of wild animals to our assistance – and the Russian regiment seemed to melt before them. In a moment the ground was thick with corpses and the survivors flying as best each one might."

With the battle fast reaching its conclusion, Teesdale committed yet another courageous act. Several wounded Russian soldiers lay strewn on the ground outside the defences,



and some of the enraged defenders sought to take their revenge on these unfortunates and ensure their demise. However Teesdale, risking his own life, suddenly intervened and saved his maimed enemies. This act of kindness was witnessed by Muravyov, who later gratefully acknowledged the unexpected humanitarian act.

The battle ended in Russian defeat, with Muravyov calling off the attack just before noon having been unable to take the city. The Russian forces had suffered 7,500 casualties in just one day.

Nevertheless, the fate of Kars was ultimately sealed by a combination of disease ravaging the city and supplies of food and ammunition running dangerously low. It had been hoped that a relief force under Selim Pasha would come to the city's rescue but as the days passed all hope of salvation faded. Desertions among the starving and exhausted defenders grew and it was only a matter of time before the inevitable surrender of the garrison would come.

Moves for the surrender duly came on 24 November. Teesdale was sent out with a flag of truce to the Russian camp to seek a meeting with the opposing generals to discuss terms for capitulation. Talks were arranged for the following day, and on the 28th the garrison lay down its arms.

However, as a mark of respect for their resolute and honourable defence, Williams was granted the honour of marching his men out of the city bearing arms. An impressed Muravyov is reputed to have said to him: "General Williams, you have made yourself a name in history, and posterity will stand amazed at the endurance, courage and the discipline which the siege has called forth in the remains of the army."

Teesdale and all the other British officers now found themselves prisoners of war. Thankfully, the Russians treated them well. Teesdale had been wounded during the fighting, receiving a severe contusion when he was hit by a piece of spent shell. The British were taken to Russia, reaching Tiflis on 8 December. By the following month, both Teesdale and Williams were en route to Moscow, where they would be presented to Tsar Alexander II in March. Following their royal meeting, both men would later be granted liberty to return to England.

Williams was particularly impressed with Teesdale's conduct during the siege. In his 12 October 1855 dispatch he wrote: "My aide-de-camp, Teesdale, had charge of the central redoubt and fought like a lion." For his service at Kars, Teesdale would receive the Order of the Mejidiye and was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in the Turkish army.

More honours were to follow, including the highest that could be given by Britain. On 21 June 1856 Teesdale was made a CB and he was also made an Officer of the Légion d'honneur, receiving the medal for the defence of Kars. However, it would be on 25 September 1857, almost two years after the siege, that he was awarded the newly established Victoria Cross for his acts of gallantry during the defence. The citation for his VC was published in *The London Gazette* and mentioned not only his counterattacks but also his saving of the wounded Russians from the furious Turkish soldiers. The medal was presented to Teesdale by Queen Victoria on 28 November during a ceremony held in the Quadrangle of Windsor Castle, in which the entire Windsor garrison was in attendance.

Above: *Contemporary map of the fortress of Kars, showing dispositions of both Ottoman and Russian forces during the siege*

Left: *General Sir William Fenwick Williams, the British officer commanding the Ottoman garrison during the Siege of Kars*

Far left: *A Russian attack is repulsed by the Ottoman garrison at Kars, during which Teesdale earned his Victoria Cross*

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JOHN BISDEE

The 1st Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen's Contingent in action against the Boers at Warmbad, Rooikop, Transvaal, South Africa, 1 September 1900

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

When the Second Boer War was declared on 11 October 1899, governments of colonies from around the British Empire offered to send troops to contribute to the British war effort. This included the governments of the six colonies of Australia (the country would not be confederated into a Commonwealth until 1 January 1901). Among the troops sent were the 1st Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen Contingent, a unit whose members would be awarded two Victoria Crosses. Most of the troops the colonies of Australia contributed were mounted units, formed before departure. This was despite a decree requesting infantry contingents as being of most service and cavalry of the least.

Australians also enlisted in British units or South African colonial units and recruitment for British units, such as the Scottish Horse, was undertaken in Australia. The Australian contribution to the war effort took place over five waves, the first coming in 1899 immediately after the outbreak of the war and drawn from the men of the colonial militia.

The second wave included the bushmen contingents (arriving between December 1899 and February 1900), recruited widely and paid for by public subscription or sponsored by wealthy individuals. The third wave of Australians were the Imperial Bushmen Contingents, recruited in a similar manner but paid for by the imperial government in London. After federation came draft contingents raised by the state governments of the new Commonwealth and then, the new federal Commonwealth Government contributed Australian Commonwealth Horse troops. Some of these troops were still aboard their ships on their way to South Africa when peace was declared in May 1902. In all, about 16,000 Australian men served in South Africa. Trooper John Hutton Bisdee arrived in the third Australian wave with the 1st Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen's Contingent in May 1900.

John Bisdee was born in the small Tasmanian community of Melton Mowbray in 1869, some 50 kilometres from the colony capital in Hobart. His grandfather had travelled to Van Diemen's Land in 1821 (its name was changed to Tasmania in 1856 to remove the stigma of the former penal colony). Educated in Hobart, John had then worked the family holdings at Hutton Park, Melton Mowbray, until he enlisted in April 1900.

Australians were valued in South Africa for their abilities to ride and shoot. In many ways, the terrain they were used to traversing in Australia matched that of the veldts of South Africa. The Australians were also resourceful and used to enduring the harsh and unforgiving environment of the Australian bush. All these things should have proved positives in South Africa. Despite their enthusiasm for the cause many Australians arrived in South Africa without much training. The colony militias only trained a few hours a month and their service did not require much of them. Similarly their officers had little training despite some efforts to remedy this. Captain Charles Cox had led members of the New South Wales Lancers to Aldershot in England to undergo training in 1899. The disparity in the Australian outlook on life and British military training and leadership were evident in South Africa but would become more pronounced during the First World War. During the Second Boer War, this fatal disparity became horrifically symbolised by the fate of Troopers Harry 'The Breaker' Morant and Peter Handcock, court-martialled and executed in February 1902 for war crimes.

The war in South Africa came as no surprise to Britain or the Empire. Tensions had been building between the Boers and Britain since the Napoleonic Wars. The two Boer republics, the South African (or Transvaal) Republic and the Orange Free State, formed in the 1850s, were recognised by Britain but tensions continued to grow. This led to the First Boer War in 1880-1881. Gold was discovered in the Transvaal in 1886 and many foreigners (especially British) flocked to the gold fields. Britain wanted to incorporate the Transvaal and the Orange Free State into a federation under British control and agitated for the rights of British citizens within Transvaal as well as control of the gold fields. Negotiations broke down in June 1899 and a series of ultimatums led to war being declared on Britain by the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State.

As early as July 1899, the Australian colony of Queensland offered to send troops and forces were requested from New South Wales and Victoria that same month. The first of these

A Portrait of Colonel John Bisdee taken during the First World War

"THEY WERE PASSING THROUGH A NARROW GORGE, VERY ROCKY AND THICKLY WOODED, WHEN THE ENEMY IN FORCE SUDDENLY OPENED FIRE AT SHORT RANGE FROM HIDDEN COVER, WOUNDING SIX OUT OF THE PARTY OF EIGHT"



***Right:** Lieutenant Colonel Bisdee in Egypt in 1919 as Assistant Provost Marshall, Australian Imperial Force*

contingents arrived in South Africa in November 1899. As such, Australian troops were involved in the three phases of the war.

The first phase, when British infantry were defeated and besieged by the more mobile Boer troops, took place between October and December 1899. The second phase, ending in September 1900, saw the British counter-offensive and most towns in South Africa coming under British control. The third phase, between September 1900 and May 1902, saw a largely guerrilla war waged between mounted Boer commandos and British mounted units. The first Australian units arrived too late, however, to be involved in the defeats of the 'black week' (10-17 December 1899) when more than 2,000 casualties were inflicted on the British by the Boers in three separate engagements. Australian troops were involved with the cavalry of Major-General John French at the relief of Kimberley and then at the battle of Paardeberg in February 1900.

Bisdee arrived with the 1st Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen's Contingent on 28 May 1900 with 121 men and 133 horses, having set sail on 26 April. His unit was involved in the later phases of the British counter-offensive. Following the defeat at Paardeberg, the Boers relied more and more on guerrilla tactics performed by fast moving mounted irregular

"TROOPER BISDEE DISMOUNTED HIS HORSE AND PLACED A WOUNDED OFFICER IN THE SADDLE, RUNNING ALONGSIDE UNTIL THEY WERE OUT OF RANGE OF THE ENEMY, WHERE HE REMOUNTED THE HORSE AND RODE TO SAFETY"

units. In response the British relied more and more on their own mounted units and especially those from Australia to whom the irregular nature of the war now seemed best suited. This was despite the incredibly harsh conditions for both horses and men. The Australians lost more men to disease than were killed by enemy action throughout the war. The units with Bisdee's (the 4th South Australians and 4th Western Australians) formed the 4th Imperial Bushmen under Lieutenant-Colonel Rowell. They proceeded to Port Elizabeth and from there were given the role of encircling the Boers in the Wittebergen Basin, a Boer mountain stronghold in the North-East Orange River Colony. A supply colony destined for Lindley and defended by the Tasmanians was attacked by General Piet De Wet's forces but these were driven off. The Tasmanians were transported by train to Praetoria in August and then marched to join General Paget at Lindley. They subsequently saw hard fighting, one account stating that the men were under fire virtually every day. The Tasmanians joined the Mounted Brigade where they were usually employed as the advance guard, especially when enemy contact was expected.

On 1 September 1900, 20 men of the squadron under the command of 20-year-old Lieutenant Guy Wylly. The lieutenant would also be awarded the VC for his actions that day. The Tasmanian Contingent were, as usual, in advance of the main force at Warmbad, near Rooikop, Transvaal. A group of eight men split off to pursue some 350 Boer cattle.

They entered a narrow gorge, rocky and thickly wooded, when a small force of Boers opened fire from cover and immediately wounded six of the eight Tasmanians, including Bisdee, Wylly and the other officer. One trooper

Colonial Troops in South Africa, 1899-1901: Australian Bushmen on the March

Below: A group photo from Trooper Bisdee's welcome home to Tasmania after he was invalided home



(Brown) was wounded and later died, Corporal Brown was also wounded.

In his citation, Trooper Bisdee, incorrectly termed a private, "was one of an advance scouting party passing through a narrow gorge, when the enemy suddenly opened fire at close range and six out of the party of eight were wounded, including two officers. The horse of one of the wounded officers bolted and Trooper Bisdee dismounted, put the officer on his own horse and took him out of range of the very heavy fire". Wylly's citation gives more details of the engagement, "That officer, seeing that one of his men was badly wounded in the leg, and that his horse was shot, went back to the man's assistance, made him take his [Lieutenant Wylly's] horse, and opened fire from behind a rock to cover the retreat of the others, at the imminent risk of being cut off himself."

These were the first two of the 14 Tasmanians to be awarded the Victoria Cross and two of the six awarded to Australians during the Second Boer War. After successfully extracting themselves, the overall action was a success. Seven Boers were captured, 100 rifles, 40,000 rounds, two supply wagons and the 350 cattle.

During the action, Bisdee was wounded and, as a result, he was invalided home in December 1900. His arrival back in Tasmania was something of a major event and he was welcomed by crowds at the train station. His, and Wylly's, Victoria Crosses were gazetted in November 1900. Wylly convalesced in Britain and was then commissioned in the South Lancashire Regiment in December 1900. Wylly received his Victoria Cross from King Edward VII on 25 July 1901. Bisdee would receive his in Hobart in August 1902. Once recovered, however, Bisdee reenlisted, this time as a lieutenant in No. 1 Company, 2nd Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen Contingent and set sail for South Africa once more.

This saw Bisdee involved in the third, guerrilla, phase of the war, arriving with 253 men and officers and 289 horses on 24 April 1901. Bisdee continued to serve in South Africa until the end of the war. The Tasmanians joined General John French in the Cape Colony and were in regular contact with various enemy commandos. They then joined Major-General 'Harry' Scobell's column and were then formed into a Flying Column under Colonel Gorringe. They were "incessantly employed" for 12 months according to the official war record. Many of these operations began with long rides at night followed by an attack on a commando the following morning.

Another Australian mounted contingent's experience can be considered typical. Between August and December 1901, the NSW Mounted Rifles rode 3,000 kilometres and were involved in 13 skirmishes. These resulted in five dead and 19 wounded with 27 Boer dead, 15 wounded and the capture of a further 196. The 2nd Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen Contingent suffered six deaths and 16 injured or otherwise struck off. Bisdee was Mentioned in Despatches during his service with this Contingent. On 22 May 1902 the Contingent embarked at Durban for Hobart, arriving home on 25 June.

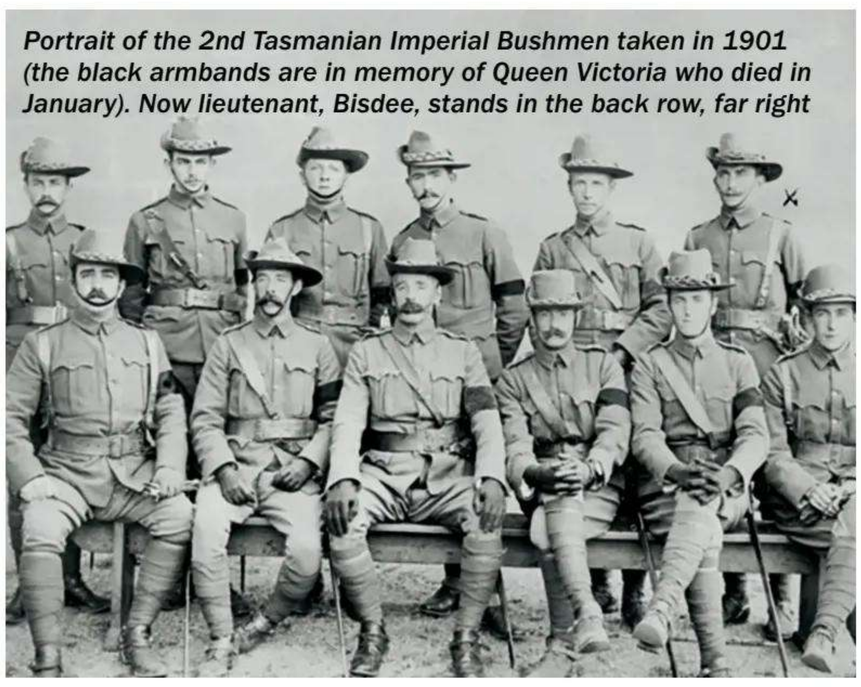
John returned to Hutton Park although he was still a celebrity – he received his Victoria Cross from the governor of the state on 11 August, 1902, in honour of the coronation of King Edward VII which had taken place on 9 August.

Bisdee's wedding in Hobart in 1904 was a major state event. He then joined the 12th Australian Light Horse, Tasmanian Mounted Infantry and became the regiment's commanding officer in 1913. In July 1915 he joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a captain in the 12th Light Horse and departed for Egypt that November. He served in active operations until wounded in 1916 and was promoted, eventually reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was assistant provost marshal in Egypt.

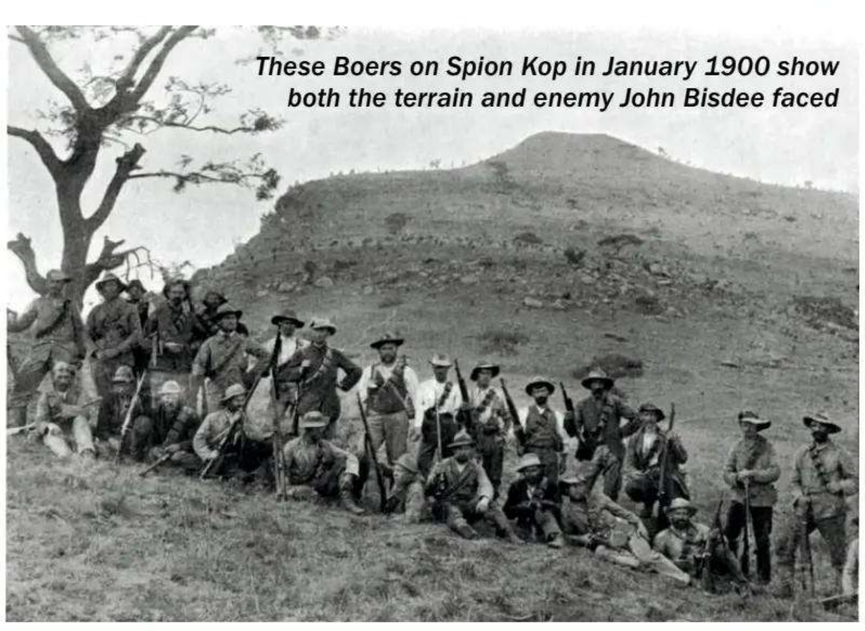
Bisdee was appointed OBE in June 1919. He died at home in Tasmania in 1930.

Images: Alamy, Australian War Memorial, Getty, TopFoto

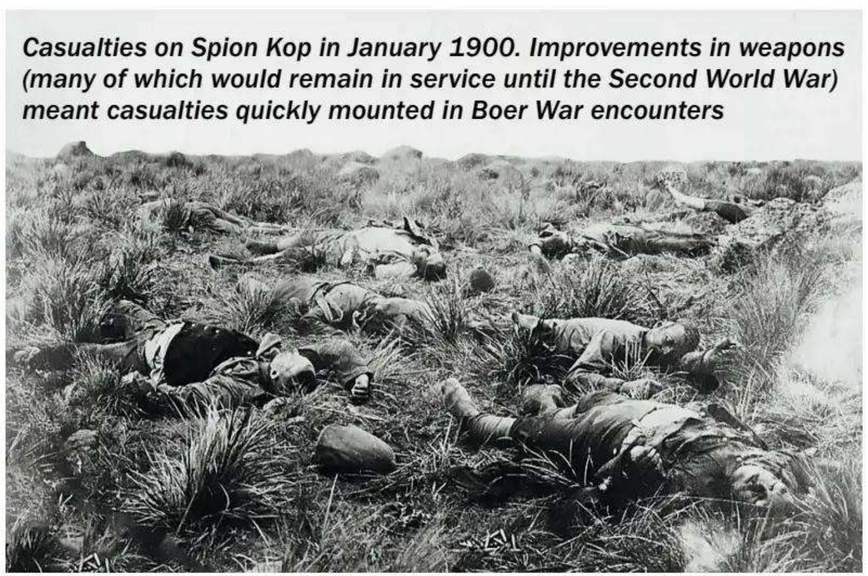




Portrait of the 2nd Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen taken in 1901 (the black armbands are in memory of Queen Victoria who died in January). Now lieutenant, Bisdee, stands in the back row, far right



These Boers on Spion Kop in January 1900 show both the terrain and enemy John Bisdee faced



Casualties on Spion Kop in January 1900. Improvements in weapons (many of which would remain in service until the Second World War) meant casualties quickly mounted in Boer War encounters

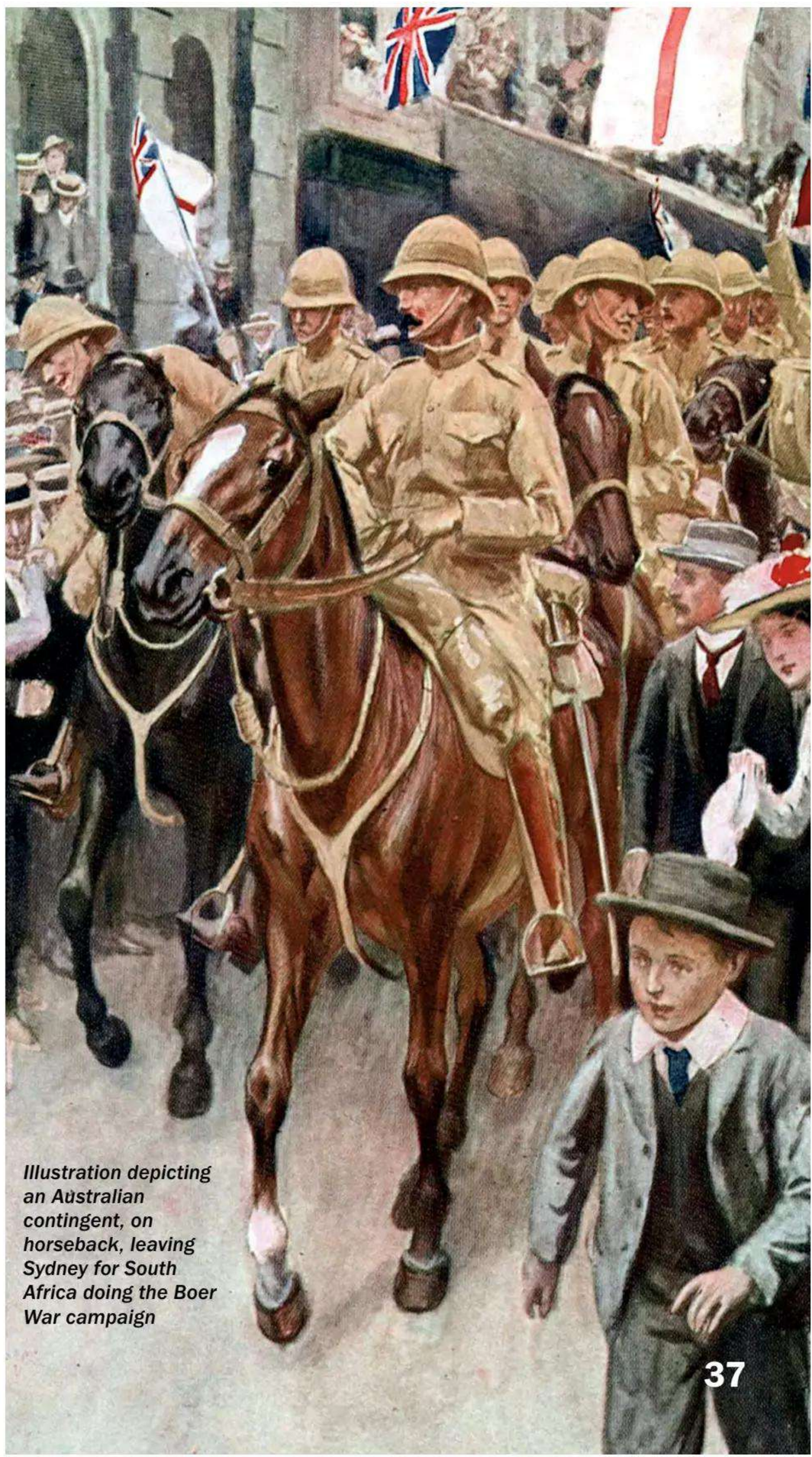


Illustration depicting an Australian contingent, on horseback, leaving Sydney for South Africa doing the Boer War campaign

1914-1918

FIRST WORLD WAR HEROES



40 ARTHUR MARTIN-LEAKE
44 HENRY JAMES NICHOLAS
48 EDWARD MANNOCK
52 ADRIAN CARTON DE WIART
56 LESLIE WILTON ANDREW
60 WILLIAM LEEFE ROBINSON
64 KHUDADAD KHAN
68 ROWLAND BOURKE



© Getty Images



ARTHUR MARTIN-LEAKE

In 1914, this officer was the first to earn the VC and bar – receiving the highest military honour twice

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

Arthur Martin-Leake, serving as a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1914 was the first man to be awarded a Bar to the Victoria Cross he received during the Second Boer War in 1902. In both circumstances Martin-Leake's conduct was to put the lives of his injured comrades first despite being exposed to constant enemy fire and being wounded himself. Martin-Leake is the only recipient to gain his two Victoria Crosses in separate wars. Only two other men have been awarded two Victoria Crosses: Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse in 1916 and 1917, and Captain Charles Upham in 1941 and 1942.

The citation for Martin-Leake's second Victoria Cross was not for a single action. Rather, it was for a series of actions throughout the period from 29 October to 8 November 1914, during which Martin-Leake rescued a large number of wounded "whilst exposed to constant fire" around Zonnebeke.

The Belgian town was located at the centre of the Ypres Salient and was central to the First Battle of Ypres, fought between 19 October and 22 November 1914. There the BEF, French, and Belgian Forces faced unrelenting attacks by the German Fourth and Sixth Armies. Only nine kilometres from Ypres, Zonnebeke saw fierce and constant fighting. In all the BEF suffered 54,000 casualties around Ypres, the Germans 80,000. The French and Belgian losses were also very high. On 16 November, the British were relieved of the defence of Zonnebeke by the French. Martin-Leake's actions in rescuing large numbers of wounded men from the field did not go unnoticed and could not go unrewarded, hence the then unprecedented honour of being awarded a Clasp to his Victoria Cross although his commanders were determined that was the only course. When, initially, the citation was going to have the date range of 5 to 12 November, Martin-Leake's Divisional commander, Major General Monro, wired back immediately, "Martin-Leake performed acts of gallantry every day between 29 October and 8 November."

By 1914 Martin-Leake was 40 years old but his conduct should not have come as a surprise to those who had served with him. Born in Hertfordshire in 1874, he studied medicine and qualified as a surgeon in 1893.

As soon as war broke out in South Africa (in October 1899), Martin-Leake requested a leave of absence from Hemel Hempstead Hospital to enlist and he joined the Hertfordshire Company of the Imperial Yeomanry. Martin-Leake's four older brothers (William, Stephen, Richard and Francis) were all in uniform and so his enlisting came as no surprise.

The tensions between the British government and the two Dutch Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State had been brewing for decades since their foundation in the 1850s. The British had attempted to annex Transvaal in 1877 and this had led to the First Boer War in 1880-1881. British defeats meant the war ended in a stalemate.

The discovery of diamonds in the Orange Free State and gold in Transvaal in 1887 only made the tensions worse. The number of (mainly British) prospectors soon outnumbered the Boers. Claims by British prospectors that they had been mistreated led to raids seeking to stir up rebellion by foreigners in the two republics. These failed as did negotiations whereby the British wanted to incorporate the two republics into a federation (which would be controlled by Britain) and thereby control the gold and diamond finds. An ultimatum to withdraw all British troops from the borders of the Transvaal and Orange Free State was rejected by Britain and the two South African republics declared war on 11 October.

The war, at first, went spectacularly well for the Boers. They launched strikes into the British territories of Natal and the Cape Colony, and besieged the garrisons of Mafeking, Ladysmith and Kimberley.

They then won a series of victories in what became known to the British as Black Week. This saw defeats of British forces at Stormberg (10 December 1899), Magersfontein (11 December), and Colenso (15 December). Things were made worse with another defeat for the British at Spion Kop in January 1900. The arrival of British reinforcements from all across her empire allowed the sieges to be relieved and swung the war in Britain's favour. British forces invaded the two republics, capturing the capital of Transvaal, Pretoria, in June 1900.

Arthur Martin-Leake in 1902 after recovering from his wounds and receiving his Victoria Cross

"FOR MOST CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY AND DEVOTION TO DUTY THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN, ESPECIALLY DURING THE PERIOD 29 OCTOBER TO 8 NOVEMBER 1914, NEAR ZONNEBEKE, IN RESCUING, WHILST EXPOSED TO CONSTANT FIRE, A LARGE NUMBER OF THE WOUNDED WHO WERE LYING CLOSE TO THE ENEMY'S TRENCHES"

Citation for Martin-Leake's Clasp to his Victoria Cross

Source: Wiki / www.theagedp.com

Next, the Boers conducted guerrilla warfare against their enemy. The British conducted a scorched earth policy to combat these tactics and also ran down individual Boer leaders and their commandos (voluntary militia).

Martin-Leake, Trooper 5778, was training in Watford and received the news of the defeats and relief of Kimberley and Mafeking while waiting to embark for South Africa. He had been so impatient to enlist he had done so as a trooper rather than as a medical officer. He boarded a ship for South Africa on 3 March, worried that the war would be finished before his arrival. He boarded the steamship Cornwall for the four-week journey with 654 men and 190 horses. Landing on 28 March, he proceeded to Stellenbosch, the main British camp in the Cape Colony, and in May joined the 100,000 man advance on Pretoria.

The Yeomanry were four days behind the main march but still saw some action. Martin-Leake wrote home in a tone of adventure-loving excitement, "The exciting times we are in at present make up well for our past troubles. I am in the very best of health and enjoying the fun."

Martin-Leake was attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps as a civil surgeon in October but he soon became bored and contemplated giving his notice (since he was a local civil appointment). Soon, however, he learned of a new force being set up, the South Africa Constabulary (SAC); its commanding officer was Major-General Robert Baden-Powell. This was to be a military force (rather than a policing one as the name might suggest), 10,000 men strong and to be ready by June 1901. Only single men aged between 20 and 35 were eligible as the force was intended to trek long distances and chase down Boer leaders, especially the elusive overall Boer commander, Christiaan De Wet. They were also required to man a line of blockhouses on the borders of 'friendly' territory. Baden-Powell designed the uniform for the SAC himself (and later used it as the basis of the uniform for the Scouts movement). To each troop of 100 men a medical corporal was attached and a doctor was assigned to each area where troops might operate.

Martin-Leake signed up to the SAC as a doctor in May 1901. Despite not enjoying the conditions, he stayed on especially at the prospect of doing field surgery. By the end of 1901, he was a travelling medical officer looking after 50 miles of SAC lines. He complained in February that the situation was a farce, the territory behind them, which was supposed to be free of Boers, was full of them.

On 8 February 1902, a patrol of 150 men of the SAC with Surgeon-Captain Martin-Leake set out from their base at Syferfontein to track a Boer commando commander, Piet Viljoen. At the Van Tondershoek farm they came upon the guerrillas, who outnumbered them, in a hollow. The two sides began to fire upon each other. The SAC began a fighting retreat back to Syferfontein. A group of 40 Boers advanced along a dried up stream-bed (a donga) and put the left flank of the SAC under fire from a distance of 100 yards. The SAC flank was commanded by Lieutenant Thomas Abraham

"HE PERFORMS THE TASK THAT COMES TO HAND WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST THOUGHT OF SELF. THE PATH OF DUTY IS THE ONLY ROAD HE KNOWS. FROM WHAT I SAW OF HIM, I SHOULD THINK THAT ANYTHING LIKE PERSONAL, PHYSICAL FEAR IS ABSOLUTELY UNKNOWN TO HIM WHEN THERE IS DUTY TO BE DONE"

Anonymous assessment of Martin-Leake by one of his Red Cross colleagues (writing in 1915)



Boer guerrillas pose near Spion Kop, January 1900

© Alamy

and Martin-Leake began to see to the wounds of the men in the firing line, under fire himself all the while. Lieutenant Abraham was then shot and Martin-Leake moved to dress his wounds but saw that the officer had been mortally wounded. Soon, all eight men were wounded but Martin-Leake continued to deliver treatment, moving from man to man. As he moved to one group, a volley from the Boers caught him and wounded him three times in the right hand and left thigh.

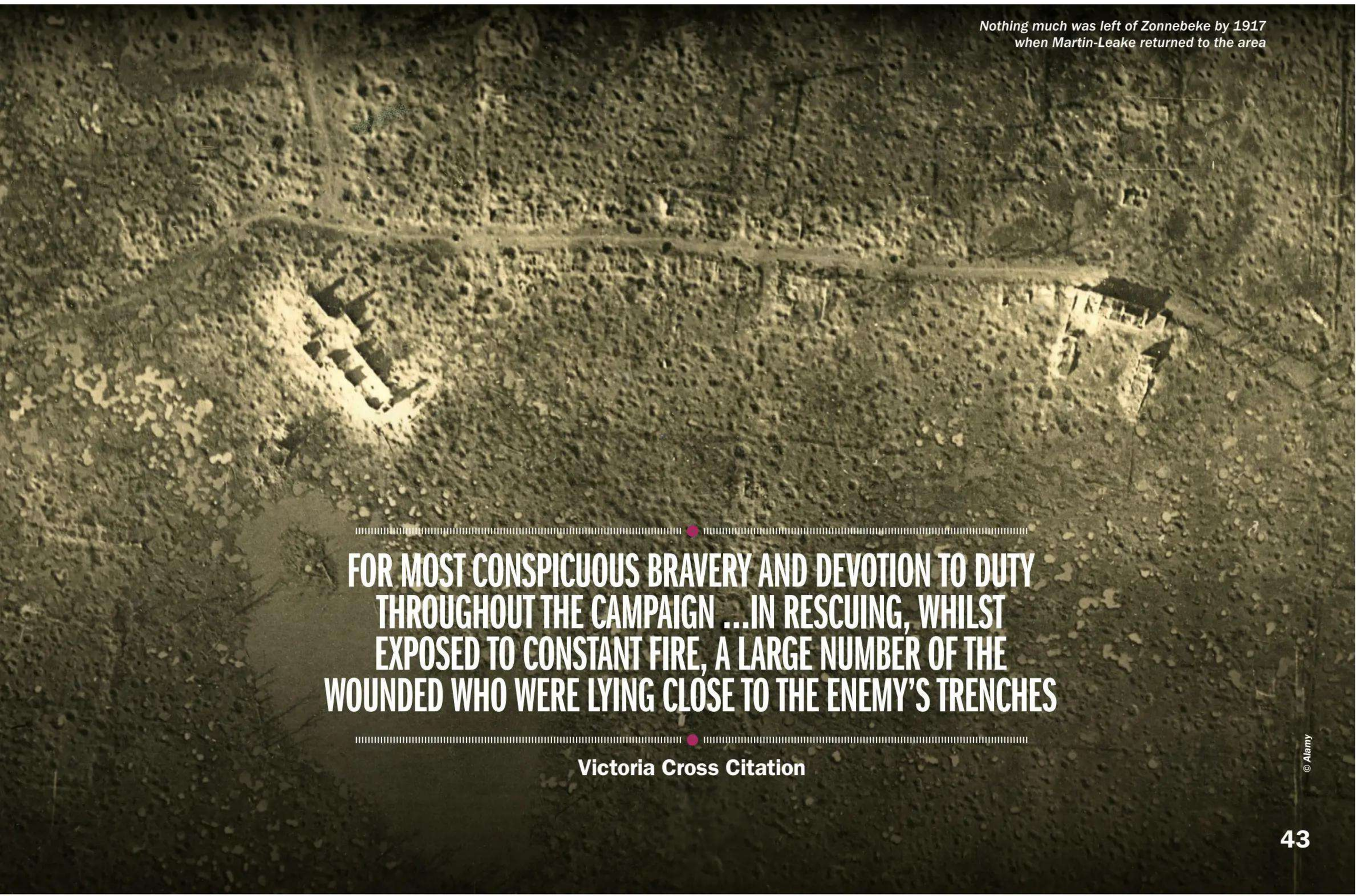
The remainder of the SAC left flank withdrew, unable to take their dead or wounded with them. The Boers advanced and, coming upon the group, expressed regret at having wounded the doctor. The wounded troopers and Martin-Leake lay for hours, the doctor refusing to drink any water while the wounded still needed care. The SAC withdrew seven miles to their blockhouses. The battle was the most severe they fought, with two officers killed, six troopers dead and ten wounded (including Martin-Leake). The SAC wounded were recovered as the Boers melted away and Martin-Leake was sent to Heidelberg. His thigh wound responded well but his hand had to be treated in England.

Martin-Leake recuperated in England and had been there only four weeks when his Victoria Cross was gazetted on 13 May and he received the medal from the king on 2 June. He underwent surgery to his hand soon after but it was not an unqualified success; his right hand remained somewhat inflexible although it did not prevent him practising as a surgeon. He joined the Bengal-Nagpur Railway in 1904 as its doctor (reassured by his brothers that little surgery would be required). He stayed there until 1912 when he volunteered with the British Red Cross to serve in the Balkan Crisis, heading to Montengro. The Balkan crisis saw the states of Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Greece and Bulgaria war with Ottoman Turkey for more autonomy. Martin-Leake arrived at Antivari to set up a hospital in a tobacco factory. He was present with a field hospital at the siege of Scutari and the fighting around the fort of Tarabosh. At the cessation of hostilities in May 1913, Martin-Leake made preparations to return to the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.

News of the outbreak of war reached India on 5 August 1914, 24 hours later than Britain's declaration of war against Germany. Martin-Leake immediately gave his notice and made arrangements to serve. He left his Victoria Cross in his Calcutta accommodation, after all, the war would be over by Christmas. He caught the first train to Bombay and then the first steamer which docked at Malta. He arrived in Paris in late August and there joined the Royal Army Medical Corps at the British Embassy. This was despite his hand injury having rendered him unfit for military service. He was attached to the 5th Field Ambulance with the Second Division. By then the British had retreated from Mons and were falling back from the unrelenting German attacks. Martin-Leake joined his unit the day before the Battle of the Marne (6-12 September) took place, followed by the Battle of the Aisne (12-15 September). Thereafter, the 'race to the sea' began and by mid-October the 5th Field Ambulance were in Ypres. There they participated in the battle of Langemarck (21-24 October) and the battle of Gheluvelt (29-31 October). From there, Martin-Leake moved with an Advanced Dressing Station to Zonnebeke to continue three weeks of continuous action and to Martin-Leake's second Victoria Cross.

Martin-Leake never spoke of his courage, even when pressed, and his family learned of the Bar to his Victoria Cross from the *London Gazette* the following February. This was despite a constant stream of informative letters home to his mother, no matter where he was stationed; he just never mentioned his own exploits. Indeed, he never wore a complete set of his medals.

Martin-Leake continued to serve with the same unit until November 1915 when he was sent, once more, to the Balkans. He returned to France in March 1916, taking command of his own field ambulance in March 1917 in time for the Arras campaign. From there he returned to Ypres in July and his service contract with the RAMC expired in September that year. He soon returned to India. He also became fascinated with flying (he had attempted to join the Royal Flying Corps in 1916). He married late, in October 1930 although his wife died in 1932. He retired home to Hertfordshire in 1936 and set up the local Home Guard unit during WWII. He died at home in 1953, the last of his siblings.



Nothing much was left of Zonnebeke by 1917 when Martin-Leake returned to the area

FOR MOST CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY AND DEVOTION TO DUTY THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN ...IN RESCUING, WHILST EXPOSED TO CONSTANT FIRE, A LARGE NUMBER OF THE WOUNDED WHO WERE LYING CLOSE TO THE ENEMY'S TRENCHES

Victoria Cross Citation

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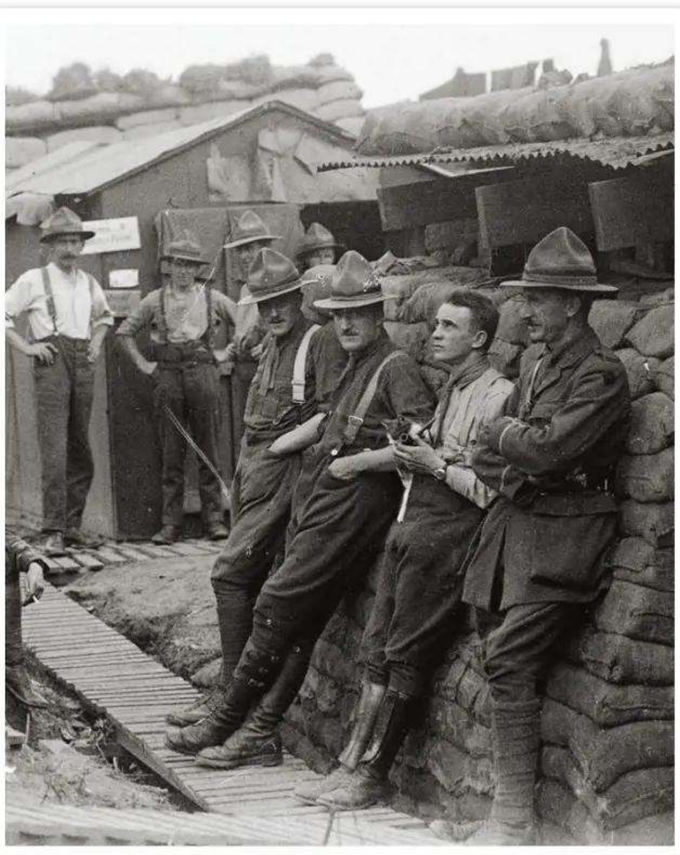
HENRY JAMES NICHOLAS

During an ANZAC offensive at Ypres, this young soldier single-handedly took down a German strongpoint before holding back concerted counterattacks

WORDS **LOUIS HARDIMAN**

The young private shivered, hunched against the cold, wearing only his leather jerkin and thin waterproof. He and the rest of the 2nd Infantry Brigade had been ordered to pack light, so he had left his warm greatcoat behind. The New Zealanders had been through four days of intense preparations for the coming action on the Polderhoek Spur, in the Ypres salient. Their officers had reassured them that, although the attack would be at noon rather than daybreak, the enemy machine guns would be silenced and blinded by a heavy bombardment and thick smokescreen. Climbing out of their trench upon the order to advance, the Kiwis immediately saw that their officers' promises had not materialised. A strong wind was already removing the smokescreen, while even more worryingly the creeping barrage in support of the advance lacked accuracy as the gunners struggled to stabilise their weapons in the mud. Screams cut across the crisp air when a few shells fell among the New Zealand ranks.

Pushing forward regardless, the private dropped to his stomach upon reaching the first small crest in the advance. The air filled with the whistle of dozens of machine gun bullets over his head, punctuated by the crack of rifle fire as his comrades shot back. Looking up, he saw pillboxes in the Polderhoek Château to his front and Gheluvelt to his right, which were laying down a ruthless hail of bullets. A heroic advance from Captain GH Greay and Lance-Corporal Minnis captured one of the pillboxes, allowing the advance to press on again. It wasn't long before the private was on his stomach again. Another German strongpoint was in the New Zealanders' way and it was his turn to prove his mettle.



***Right:** Men from the New Zealand Rifle Brigade at Ypres, September 1917*

Private Henry James Nicholas was one of the approximately 100,000 New Zealanders who served overseas during the First World War. A carpenter and well-known amateur boxer from Canterbury, he joined New Zealand's Territorial Force in 1915, serving in the Field Engineers. His two brothers, Frederick and Ernest, had already left for Europe as part of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Frederick returned, one of the 5,212 Kiwis wounded in the Gallipoli Campaign. It is not known whether he'd inspired Nicholas to sign up, but by February 1916 he had volunteered for Great War service and was on a troopship three months later.

Nicholas was straight into the thick of it, receiving training at Sling Camp in Wiltshire, where he won the middleweight boxing championship. Shortly after, he was posted to the 1st Battalion of the Canterbury Regiment on the Western Front. Danger followed Nicholas at every turn, seeing action as part of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, New Zealand Division. He took part in the Battle of Messines, followed by the Battle of Passchendaele. Despite constantly being in the line of fire, Nicholas picked up only scratches, bruises and a case of mumps.

Field Marshal Douglas Haig reduced activity in Ypres in the winter of 1917, but men like Nicholas would continue to be involved in local operations. Haig wanted to keep the Germans occupied to prevent them from being transferred to the Battle of Cambrai.

Images: Getty, PD / Te Rua Mahara o Te Kawanatanga, Archives New Zealand

A portrait of Nicholas painted by Annie Elizabeth Kelly

"THE SUCCESS OF THE OPERATIONS WAS IN A CONSIDERABLE MEASURE DUE TO HIS GREAT EXAMPLE AND CONTEMPT OF DANGER"

MM Citation

The Kiwis were assigned to an operation on the Polderhoek Spur, three miles (5km) east of Ypres. Taking this low and east-running ridge would deepen the Entente lines and keep German artillery observers from using the view it afforded over the British position between Polygon Wood and Menin Road. In the days preceding the operation, heavy artillery bombarded the German position at Polderhoek Château and howitzers cut through the German wire. Finally, on 3 December 1917, the New Zealanders sallied out of the forward trenches in a skirmish formation to push the German 19th Reserve Division from the spur.

While his comrades hugged the ground and machine gun bullets flew overhead, Nicholas leapt to his feet and charged across the Ypres mud until he was within a grenade throw of the German strongpoint. His uninjured streak continued in the face of the greatest danger he had seen. With a pugilist's controlled aggression, Nicholas shot and killed the commanding officer before dropping into the German trench. He threw grenades and stabbed with his bayonet at anybody that moved. Nicholas finally stopped when the remaining four Germans surrendered to him, their comrades lying dead around them or running for their lives.

With this strongpoint out of action, Nicholas' unit advanced to within touching distance of the Polderhoek Château and established a defensive position to protect the advance's right flank. They brought rifle and machine gun fire to bear against the German defences, giving their comrades much-needed cover. However, the New Zealanders' left flank, led by the 1st Company, hadn't made such impressive progress. They had lost many of their most experienced officers early in the attack and were held up under heavy fire. Heroic but unsuccessful efforts had been made to capture pillboxes and move forwards, such as by Lieutenant E G Bristed, who was killed during a solo charge.

The New Zealanders made two further efforts to break through the German position. Sections from the 13th Company were sent forward to assist the left flank but came under withering machine gun fire almost immediately after leaving their trenches and the advance quickly collapsed. Half-an-hour later, an entire platoon from the 13th Company rushed forward, to little avail. Reflecting on the failure, General Sir Henry Rawlinson conceded that strongpoints south of Polderhoek Château, similar to that captured by Nicholas, had been too much for the New Zealanders to overcome.



Nicholas (second from left) pictured with his Victoria Cross, 10 July 1918

"PRIVATE NICHOLAS RUSHED FORWARD ALONE, SHOT THE OFFICER IN COMMAND OF THE STRONGPOINT, AND OVERCAME THE REMAINDER OF THE GARRISON OF 16 WITH BOMBS AND BAYONETS"

VC Citation, *The London Gazette*

New Zealanders take advantage of a pause in the action at Ypres to make tea among the shell holes



ANZAC soldiers attend Nicholas' funeral at Vertigneul Churchyard, France

The attack remained approximately 450ft (140m) short of the château, with little hope of closing the gap. Each of the attacking battalions sustained 50 per cent casualties and more assaults would yield high losses. The Kiwis dug in at a new frontline, ready to protect their meagre gains from German counterattacks. The enemy's riposte came during the bitter cold of 4 December, during which Nicholas was tasked with distributing ammunition across the line, under constant machine gun and rifle fire. Aided by British artillery, the New Zealanders forced back the German infantry. The Germans launched a more successful raid the following morning – 80 men caught the New Zealanders' left flank by surprise and knocked out a Lewis gun before being forced back. After these unsuccessful attempts at an infantry counterattack, the Germans put up an observation balloon and pounded the New Zealand position. When the bombardment finally eased in the evening, the surviving New Zealanders were relieved by the British IX Corps. Nicholas had earned his Victoria Cross and could take some rest in the reserve.

Scores of New Zealanders lost their lives and hundreds were wounded in the action on the Polderhoek Spur, a sizable proportion of the 1,198 New Zealand casualties in December 1917. But tragically their heroism proved to be futile. On 14 December, German infantry launched a counterattack and regained all of the lost ground.

Nicholas was promoted to corporal on 3 December and received a VC on 11 January 1918. He continued to fight with valour after Polderhoek Spur and was transferred to the Somme on 23 March, where his performance earned him a promotion to lance sergeant on 21 May and sergeant on 28 May. Soon after, he travelled to England to formally receive his VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace. Summer turned to autumn, and after recovering from a case of tonsillitis Nicholas returned to the Western Front to fight in the Hundred Days Offensive. Posted on the Welsh and Bon Avis Ridges from late September to early October 1918, he was involved in breaching the Hindenburg Line and earned the Military Medal (MM).

On 23 October 1918, three weeks before the end of the war, the 27-year-old's luck finally ran out. His company was fighting for bridgeheads at the River Ecaillon and, as ever, Nicholas was in the thick of the action, showing scant regard for his safety as machine gun fire poured his way. As the autumn Sun set, casting an eerie glow over the quagmire, Nicholas was killed by a stray bullet as he returned to camp. To honour his sacrifice, both his VC and MM were subsequently donated to the Canterbury Museum and remain on display to this day.

Images: Getty



EDWARD ‘MICK’ MANNOCK

New to flying and shunned for his working-class roots, this young Irishman nonetheless mastered his craft to become the RAF’s first VC recipient

WORDS **LOUIS HARDIMAN**

The afternoon of 7 May 1917 would prove to be a fateful date for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Edward ‘Mick’ Mannock, a rookie pilot, was rocketing along in his Nieuport 23 a handful of feet from the ground, racing towards the enemy observation balloons that No 40 Squadron had been harassing for weeks. Simultaneously, No 56 Squadron was attacking the balloons from above, navigating blasts from the German flak cannons below. The squadron’s aerial dynamo Albert Ball, Mannock’s greatest inspiration with 44 confirmed victories, was engaged in a heated dogfight with enemy fighters, darting among the thick cumulonimbus giants. As the aircraft separated, Ball peeled off into a black, brooding thundercloud. The next time he was seen, the young man was flying upside down with a dead propeller and descending fast, having gotten disoriented in the clouds.

Ball’s plane dropped like a stone and crashed into the earth, killing him instantly. Meanwhile, the balloon in Mannock’s sights was also dropping rapidly to evade the attack from above. The trap closed as Mannock’s target came within range of his Vickers gun. After a few short bursts the balloon fell rapidly, its pilot parachuting out in the nick of time before his craft burst into flames and plummeted to the ground. This was the first of Mannock’s 61 aerial victories amassed during the First World War, a tally that would make him the first Victoria Cross recipient of the new Royal Air Force (RAF).



***Above:** Mannock’s medals and dog tags were auctioned by Sotheby’s in 1992 before their acquisition by the RAF Museum London*

Misfit in the mess and the skies

Great War airmen respected any victory against an observation balloon as the pilot would have to navigate fighter patrols, anti-aircraft artillery, smoke screens and more to get a clean shot. Yet Mannock’s reputation as a “boorish know-it-all”, as one lieutenant described him, stuck in a mess hall filled with upper-class gentlemen barely out of public school. As a working-class Irish nationalist and socialist, Mannock could not have been more out of place.

A late entry into the war after being interned in Turkey, Mannock was so ill from mistreatment that the Ottomans had judged him unfit for military service and suitable for repatriation. This assessment was misguided, and Mannock was soon well enough to join the RFC by 1916, which became the RAF in April 1918. Here, he learned to fly and was assigned to No 40 Squadron on the Western Front. From the first night he set foot in the mess, Mannock made a terrible impression, accidentally sitting in the chair of a recently killed pilot before lecturing his fellow pilots on aerial combat. The new pilot’s behaviour in the air hardly helped, with Mannock’s new colleagues witnessing

EDWARD ‘MICK’ MANNOCK

Mannock pictured wearing his flight gear. WWI pilots were issued long leather jackets and fur hats and gloves to protect them from the elements

“THIS HIGHLY DISTINGUISHED OFFICER, DURING THE WHOLE OF HIS CAREER IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, WAS AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF FEARLESS COURAGE, REMARKABLE SKILL, DEVOTION TO DUTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE, WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN SURPASSED”

Victoria Cross Citation

his fear of combat. Flying over no-man's land during the Arras offensive, he came under fire from German flak for the first time and fell out of formation in panic. Mannock became known as an overly cautious pilot during engagements, and most thought it was best to stay away from him in the skies, as well as on the ground.

From novice to 'ace'

Devoting his time to practising and gaining confidence, Mannock finally came into his element, amassing 15 victories and earning his first of two Military Crosses. He pioneered a bold strategy of flying just yards from the target to ensure all his rounds found their mark. Reflecting in his diary, Mannock wrote: "My man gave me an easy mark. I was only ten yards away from him — on top, so I couldn't miss! A beautifully coloured insect he was — red, blue, green, yellow. I let him have 60 rounds at that range, so there wasn't much left of him."

Mannock's abilities would only grow behind the stick of a Royal Aircraft Factory SE5, which replaced his Nieuport in November 1917. The SE5 was finally Mannock's chance to fly in one of the fastest and most manouevrable fighters of the First World War, armed to the teeth with two .303 calibre guns firing through the propeller via an interrupter gear. His first kill in the SE5 and last for 40 Squadron came on New Year's Day 1918, taking down a Hannover CLIII multi-role aircraft. Shortly after, he wrote a letter to his sister: "Hope all is well in Birmingham. Plenty of work for the airmen and plenty of casualties. Am doing special air work by myself now. A big feather in my cap. Am expecting the DSO [Distinguished Service Order] soon, but may get a white cross instead. Who cares anyway? PS, I have got 16 Huns down to date."

"HE HAD DIED AS HE SO OFTEN EXPRESSED A WISH THAT HE MIGHT – AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS FAME; AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY; AND WHILE TEACHING A BEGINNER HIS ART"

Lieutenant Donald Inglis

Creating the next generation of 'aces'

Mannock had become a respected pilot, promoted to senior flight commander in 74 Squadron, where he began training the less-experienced pilots at London Colney. His lessons created several more 'aces', guided by his "Fifteen Rules on Air Combat" and the mantra "Always above. Seldom on the same level. Never below." But it was the battlegrounds of France he dreamt of, telling the visiting General David Henderson: "If I can't get back to France with permission, I shall return without permission." Confronted with the threat of a court martial, Mannock replied: "Death is better than dishonour, sir!"

74 Squadron was soon back in combat with Mannock in command of a flight and earning a DSO by May 1918. His tally rapidly rose to 52, but the constant threats faced by Great War airmen were taking a toll on him when he returned to England on 18 June 1918. Family and friends were concerned by his nervousness, and he reportedly suffered from a breakdown. Yet Mannock always refused to



A Nieuport takes down a German Albatross. Low speeds and weak armament meant aerial battles were fought at very close proximity

take time off and never showed weakness in front of his men, so he gained the expected promotion to commander of No 85 Squadron in July 1918. It badly needed someone like Mannock who could lead them over the lines each day and find contact with the enemy.

He was immediately well-loved, trusted and respected, and quickly set about forming an elite fighting unit. Mannock kept mentoring and teaching in 85, repeatedly impressing upon his men the importance of not following stricken German planes down to within range of rifle and machine gun fire. He kept producing unmatchable performances in the skies, adding nine victories to his tally in just 21 days and earning a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Mannock’s last flight

On 26 July 1918, Mannock took a new arrival, Lieutenant Donald Inglis, into the skies to obtain his first victory. Inglis was told to sit tight on Mannock’s tail, and a waggle of the wings would be an instruction to come closer. After constant waggling, Inglis’ SE5 was almost touching Mannock’s, zooming along the lines barely 30ft (10 metres) above the ground. Suddenly, Mannock turned back towards Saint-Omer, climbing rapidly before diving on an LVG reconnaissance plane south of Calonne-sur-la-Lys. On his first pass, Mannock took out the gunner, allowing Inglis free rein to pump bullets into the target, bringing it down among the beech trees of Pacult Wood.



***Above:** SE5s take on Fokker D-7s, which were a prime target for fighter ‘aces’ like Mannock*

Sadly, Mannock failed to follow his own instructions, circling the downed enemy within range of fire from the ground. Across no-man’s-land, Private Edward Naulls watched in horror as the machine guns below opened up on the two SE5s, turning Mannock’s plane into a ball of fire and putting a hole through Inglis’ fuel tank. Mannock’s burning SE5 arced in a lazy turn before striking the ground, and his body was thrown over 750ft (228 metres) from the wreckage.

News of Mannock’s death was a blow to the men of 85 Squadron, who went pale with the news and staggered to their quarters to weep. If even a legend like Mannock could be killed, so could they. Men of other squadrons arrived in the evening in an attempt to cheer 85 Squadron up with a night of singing and drinking, remembering Mannock with the shared understanding he would not have wanted them to be upset. No 85 Squadron was disbanded in July 1918 but reformed to fight in the Second World War as a night fighter unit. Meanwhile, Mannock’s close friend Ira Jones led a successful lobbying campaign for his posthumous VC, which was presented to his father at Buckingham Palace in July 1919. It’s now on display at the RAF Museum London.



An SE5 fighter similar to that flown by Mannock. It was powered by a 200hp Hispano engine that could reach 118mph (190kp/h) in level flight

Images: Alamy, Getty



ADRIAN CARTON DE WIART

Literally shot to pieces during his years of service in the British Army, the Belgian native Adrian Carton de Wiart earned Britain's highest honour for gallantry during the Somme Offensive

WORDS **FRANK JASTRZEMBSKI**

When speaking of Sir Garnet Wolseley, Dr. Joseph H. Lehmann observed that the British general "believed the best possible way to get ahead in the army was to try to get killed every time he had a chance." Wolseley had plenty of scars, medals and honours to show for it. Another soldier in the British Army, Adrian Carton de Wiart, lived by Wolseley's maxim. The transplanted Belgian-British army officer possessed a strange combination of a fiery temper, sense of humour in the darkest times, humility and an obsession to "justify his existence" through reckless heroism. His hair's-breadth escapes on the battlefield were legendary, and he would earn the Victoria Cross during the defence of La Boisselle in July 1916.

Born in Brussels, Belgium in May 1880, Adrian Carton de Wiart was never meant to be a soldier. His father, Carton de Wiart, a successful lawyer, moved his family to Cairo after the death of his wife. There he became a legal advisor to Khedive Tewfik. In 1888 he married an English woman, who ensured her new husband's children grew up to revere everything British.

In 1897 the 17-year-old de Wiart was sent to the University of Oxford to study law. Although well-versed in the French, English and Arabic languages, he failed as a student. He would rather be out playing cricket than hitting the books and hated the boundaries a university presented to his adventurous spirit.

When war broke out in Africa between the British Empire and the Boers in 1899, de Wiart abandoned his studies, feigned British citizenship, lied about his age and enlisted as a volunteer with Paget's Horse under the last name of Carton. "At that moment I knew, once and for all, that war was in my blood," he professed later.

It was not long before the reckless Oxford dropout was wounded. He was shot in the stomach and groin by a Boer sharpshooter during a skirmish. Fearing he would be sent back to Oxford after his recovery, he pleaded with his father to allow him to remain in the British Army. With his son failing at his studies and with his mind locked on other ambitions, Carton de Wiart had no choice but to yield.

Rising to the rank of captain, de Wiart served in Somaliland in the run-up to Britain's entry into the First World War. He was serving with 'C' Company of the Somaliland Camel Corps, who had been tasked with crushing a Dervish force under the command of the Islamic leader Mohammed Abdullah Hassan – recognised among the British ranks as 'Mad Mullah'.

"FRANKLY, I HAD ENJOYED THE WAR; IT HAD GIVEN ME MANY BAD MOMENTS, LOTS OF GOOD ONES, PLENTY OF EXCITEMENT..."

Adrian Carton de Wiart

During the assault on the six redoubts at Shimber Berris, de Wiart was wounded in his left eye and elbow, and he had a chunk of his ear torn off when a Dervish shot was fired at him from less than a yard away. Patched up by the surgeon, he returned to the fight. He received another wound to the same eye from a ricocheting bullet but remained in the field.

Captain de Wiart's badly damaged eye was subsequently removed after the action, though he resisted, fearful of what it could do to his military career. He received the Distinguished Service Order for his service at Shimber Berris. His thought on facing death and losing his eye in Somaliland: "It had all been exhilarating fun."

He saw the loss of his eye as an opportunity rather than an end to his career. He was sent back to England to recuperate, frothing at the idea of being closer to the fighting on the Western Front. He appeared before the Medical Board to receive permission to return to active service. The examiners relented and allowed him to return to the field under the condition that he wore a glass eye. Following the board's approval, de Wiart tossed the annoying glass ball out of the window of a taxi, donning a black patch instead for the remainder of his life.

Back in action, this time on the Western Front, he was wounded in the left hand in an

"HE DISPLAYED THE UTMOST ENERGY AND COURAGE IN FORCING OUR ATTACK HOME. AFTER THREE OTHER BATTALION COMMANDERS HAD BECOME CASUALTIES, HE CONTROLLED THEIR COMMANDS AND ENSURED THAT THE GROUND WON WAS MAINTAINED AT ALL COSTS. HE FREQUENTLY EXPOSED HIMSELF IN THE ORGANISATION OF POSITIONS AND OF SUPPLIES, PASSING UNFLINCHINGLY THROUGH FIRE BARRAGE OF THE MOST INTENSE NATURE. HIS GALLANTRY WAS INSPIRING TO ALL"

VC Citation

Lieutenant Colonel Adrian Carton de Wiart. He is facing to his left to conceal his missing eye

artillery strike during the Second Battle of Ypres. This German shell fragment left his hand, in De Wiart's own words, a "gory mess". His left palm was gone and most of his wrist was shot away. Two of his fingers hung only by a thread of skin. The surgeon refused to remove his two remaining fingers, so de Wiart handled it himself, tearing them off. Sent back to England to recover, what remained of the heap of flesh that used to be his hand was amputated.

Yet again convincing the Medical Board examiners to allow him to return to the front (he argued he was still able to shoot and fish), de Wiart transferred from the cavalry to an infantry battalion. Now a lieutenant colonel, he took command of the 8th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. The unit was badly in need of field officers, prompting de Wiart to seek service in the infantry, where he would have a greater chance for distinction. He returned to the front just in time to play a vital role in the Somme Offensive in July 1916.

The French village of La Boisselle was an imposing obstacle for General William Pulteney's III Corps. The Germans turned each

"HE IS A MODEL OF CHIVALRY AND HONOUR"

Winston Churchill

wrecked home and building in the village into a mini citadel, with all approaches covered by machine gun crews – some of the best-trained soldiers in the German army. Two mines were detonated under the German lines by engineers in the hope they would throw the German defenders into a state of confusion.

During the first two days of fighting between Fricourt and La Boisselle the 21st Division made progress and forced the Germans back. But on the division's left, the 34th and 8th Divisions of the III Corps made little headway at La Boisselle against the German 28th Reserve and 26th Reserve Divisions.

On 2 July fresh reinforcements from the 19th Division, originally held in reserve, led to the British securing a foothold within La Boisselle. Lieutenant Colonel de Wiart's battalion, alongside the 10th Warwicks, were called up to support the battered Eighth North Staffords and 10th Worcesters.

De Wiart described the disarray in the village: "La Boisselle was a truly bloody scene. The casualties had been appalling: there were dead everywhere, not a house standing and the ground as flattened as if the very soul had been blasted out of the earth and turned into a void." Together, these combined British units wrestled, metre-by-metre, trenches from the Germans. By 6pm de Wiart was placed in command of all the units in La Boisselle – the other three senior battalion commanders were either dead or wounded.

A good portion of the village was in the hands of the British by next morning. De Wiart received orders from his division commander, General Tom Bridges – a daring character himself – to hold on to La Boisselle at all costs. The Germans counterattacked the same day at 8.30am. The author Everard Wyrall, in his history *The 19th Division*, declared that



Soldiers of the 10th Worcesters bringing in German prisoners captured during the fight for La Boisselle

***Above:** British soldiers in a trench near La Boisselle. Captain de Wiart wrote, "La Boisselle was a truly bloody scene"*



this German counterattack "led to what was probably the most intense fighting the Division had up to that period experienced." The battalions were forced halfway back through the village by 12.30pm. It looked as if the British would be driven from the ground they had fought so hard to capture.

Lieutenant Colonel de Wiart's men dug in around some hedges and fought to defend every inch of ground. Armed with only his walking stick, de Wiart inspired his men with his trademark calm under fire. Disregarding German artillery shells and bullets (miraculously dodging sniper bullets), he filled his men with admiration. With his only good arm, de Wiart yanked the pins from his Mills grenades out with his teeth, lobbing them at groups of onrushing German soldiers. It is hard to imagine what these German soldiers expressed to one another when they witnessed this crippled warrior with a pinned-up sleeve and a black eyepatch hurling grenades in their direction. His heroism and inspirational leadership motivated his men to hold their lines and allowed the British to secure La Boisselle by 5 July.

Around 3,500 men from the 19th Division fell in the fighting at La Boisselle. Adrian Carton de Wiart was one of three members of the division to be awarded the Victoria Cross. His citation, printed in the *London Gazette* on 9 September 1916, gave an admirable evaluation of his deeds.

Adrian Carton de Wiart was wounded a total of eight times before the close of the war and rose to the rank of brigadier general. He was invested by King George V with the Victoria Cross on 29 November 1916. He had met the king once before: while visiting British soldiers on the front line, King George ran into the eccentric officer. Striking up a conversation with the king, the Belgian thought it was an appropriate time to crack a joke. He commented on the irony that he had served in the British Army for ten years without being a British subject. King George, not pleased at all with de Wiart's remark, asked that he see to it that he rectify the issue of his citizenship.

Adrian Carton de Wiart continued in the service of the British Army for another 29 years. During the interwar years he served as a military attaché in Poland, narrowly escaping a Cossack ambush during the Soviet invasion of 1920. During World War II he commanded the Central Norwegian Expeditionary Force in 1940 and headed the British Military Mission in Yugoslavia in 1941. He was captured by the Italians after being shot down over the Mediterranean, escaped through a tunnel during his imprisonment but was recaptured. After his release, he served as Winston Churchill's representative to Nationalist China in October 1943.

The 'unkillable soldier' died in Ireland in June 1963. General de Wiart never viewed his life as adventurous but rather full of "misadventures". He declared in his autobiography years later, "That I should have survived them is to me by far the most interesting thing about it." He seemed to be one of those rare individuals who had a knack for eluding death but who also enjoyed facing it.

"IT MAY BE FOUND THAT MAJOR GENERAL DE WIART ONCE MORE OUT-HOLLYWOODED HOLLYWOOD"

Army News, 16 September 1943

Images: Alamy, Getty



LESLIE WILTON ANDREW

In a fierce assault to retake the village of La Basseville, Passchendaele, this Kiwi corporal charged & captured multiple enemy machine gun positions

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

Corporal 'Les' Andrew commanded a force of 15 men, ordered to take out a machine gun nest on the northern edge of the village of La Basseville in support of the main assault to take the village. This attack launched at 3.50am on 31 July 1917 and was immediately halted by another hidden machine gun nest, which opened up on the front platoon. From his position in support of the main assault, Andrew realised that if the attack were to succeed, he would need to take out the new machine gun nest first, before advancing on his original objective.

Leslie Andrew was one of 16 New Zealanders to receive the Victoria Cross during WWI – aged 20, he was the youngest Kiwi recipient. Born in the Wanganui region of the North Island, he attended one of the country's most prestigious schools, Wanganui Collegiate. He had been a sergeant in the Cadets and Territorials and volunteered in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in October 1915, shipping out to Egypt in May 1916. He put his age down as 20 to ensure he would be accepted, although he was already 18. When he shipped out, he reverted to private in order to join B Company of the 2nd Battalion, Wellington Infantry Regiment. The regiment sailed for England in July. By August he was serving on the Somme, where he was wounded in September.

In January 1917 he was promoted to corporal, and he participated in the Battle of Messines in June 1917. It was as a corporal that Andrew was given command of a small detachment to neutralise the machine gun nest that dominated La Basseville, Belgium.

The Battle of Passchendaele, or the Third Battle of Ypres, in Flanders, raged from July to November 1917 and was fought for control of the commanding, 80-metre (260-feet) high ridges that ran south and east from the Belgian city of Ypres. These ridges bulged into the Germans lines, creating a salient, and capturing them would prove advantageous.

The trench lines of both sides had changed little since the Second Battle of Ypres in April and May 1915. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's plan was controversial (and remains so), opposed by the French as well as British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. It is debated whether Haig should have awaited the arrival of American forces before launching his assault. Approval was only received on 25 July for the plan to go ahead, but Haig had already ordered a preparatory bombardment for his assault, which began on 11 July.

In the early stages of the Battle of Passchendaele, the New Zealanders were tasked with capturing the village of La Basseville, southwest of the Messines Ridge, on the extreme right of Haig's grand offensive. The Kiwis captured the village on 26 July but were repulsed by a German counterattack, which retook the village the following day.

Reinforcements were called up, consisting of the 336 men and officers of the 2nd Battalion, Wellington Infantry Regiment. The ground was studded with wire and machine gun emplacements. The most dominant defensive position was a machine gun nest located on the second floor of a two-storey building at the northern end of the village. The task of capturing this nest was given to two sections of the 2nd Wellingtons – 15 men in total – commanded by Corporal Leslie Andrew. They were instructed to advance separately from the main attack in order to neutralise the threat.

A creeping barrage would provide cover, and Andrew and his men were to follow closely behind it. The main attack, supported by mortar and machine gun fire, went in at 3.50am and immediately became suppressed by another machine gun nest, hidden in a fence-line. While the leading platoon took shelter, Andrew, seeing this new threat, diverted his party and charged the second machine gun emplacement from the flank, killing the crew and capturing the gun.

Confusion arises at this point in records of the battle. According to war correspondent Malcolm Ross, 11 of Andrew's 15-man team were wounded or killed in this initial action. Andrew then continued the mission himself with three remaining men, rushing to catch up with the creeping barrage. The regiment diarist does not record any casualties in Andrew's sections, however, nor does the official historian. Another account gives credit to Lieutenant Bliss (leading the foremost platoon of the main attack) for capturing the first machine gun, while another account gives all the credit to Corporal Andrew. The *London Gazette* also gives the credit to Andrew, although it too gives no account of his group sustaining any casualties.

A portrait of Andrew taken in early 1918 showing his Victoria Cross Ribbon Bar (note the lion rampant badge of the Wellington Infantry Regiment)

"HE DISPLAYED GREAT SKILL AND DETERMINATION IN HIS DISPOSITION, FINALLY CAPTURING THE POST, KILLING SEVERAL OF THE ENEMY AND PUTTING THE REMAINDER TO FLIGHT. CPL. ANDREW'S CONDUCT THROUGHOUT WAS UNEXAMPLED FOR COOL DARING, INITIATIVE, AND FINE LEADERSHIP, AND HIS MAGNIFICENT EXAMPLE WAS A GREAT STIMULANT TO HIS COMRADES"

London Gazette, 4 September 1917

Andrew continued on to his original mission of the machine gun in the two-storey house but discovered that a frontal assault would be pointless. Malcom Ross reported that, "Cooly sizing up the situation, he led his little party round for a quarter of a mile on their stomachs through some thistles and attacked the German position from the rear." They threw bombs and dislodged the second machine gun crew, capturing that gun as well. All members of the party were slightly wounded during the operation, according to Ross. Although the *London Gazette* entry for his gallantry ends there, Ross recorded that Corporal Andrew continued to press his attack, capturing yet another machine gun and even going forward from there to reconnoitre the German positions.

The assault to retake La Basseville had been a success and had lasted little over half an hour. Andrew's further actions may have alerted the New Zealanders to a German counterattack at 5.00am, which was thwarted by a well-directed artillery barrage. Other German assaults were to follow, and at the end of the day, the 2nd Wellingtons had suffered 40 per cent casualties (134 out of the 336 who went in, with 37 killed). Many years later, Andrew recounted that he personally had killed eight enemy soldiers that day, six with his bayonet.

The actions of the Wellingtons that day garnered 14 Military Medals, three Distinguished Conduct Medals, four Military Crosses and Andrew's Victoria Cross. One of the machine guns captured by Andrew (it is unclear which) was sent back to New Zealand as a trophy. It is housed today in the Wanganui Museum.

The following day, on 1 August, Andrew was promoted to sergeant and talk of his heroic conduct became widespread. His action was gazetted on 4 September, and he was invested with his Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace on 31 October that year. Andrew was then sent for officer training and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in Mach 1918. He was training members of the NZEF in Britain when the war ended.

Andrew remained in the army following the Armistice and took up a post in the small New Zealand Permanent Army. He was promoted to captain by the age of 27 and served in India

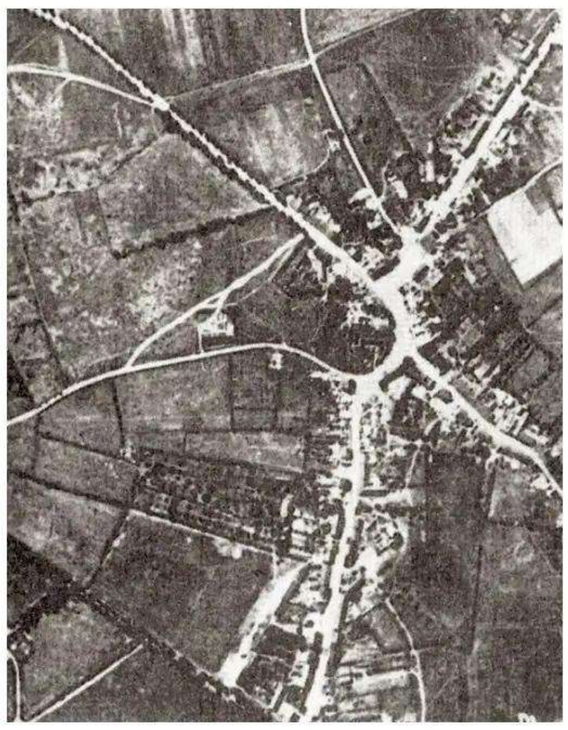
"HIS WORK WAS VERY FINE AND HE DISPLAYED GREAT GALLANTRY AND SPLENDID LEADERSHIP... I AM PARTICULARLY PLEASED THAT IT WILL BE A WANGANUI BOY TO EARN THE COVETED DISTINCTION"

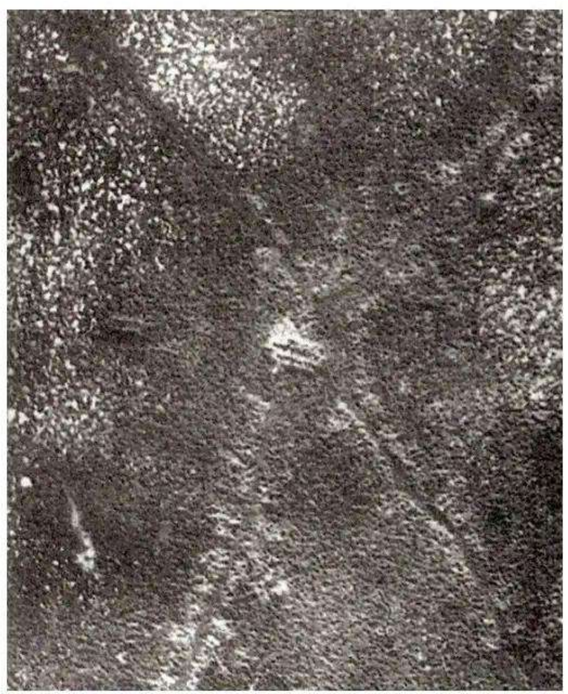
Major William Cunningham, commanding officer Wellington Infantry Battalion



***Below:** Aerial view of Passchendaele before and after the bombardment during the Third Battle of Ypres. This bombardment was what Andrew later described as "a picnic" compared to what his men endured in Crete*

A line of the troops of the New Zealand army queue up to buy stores from a field canteen near the Amiens-Albert road, September 1916





A portrait of Leslie Andrew taken before he joined the 2nd Wellingtons, when he was a sergeant in the Territorials



(attached to the 2nd Highland Light Infantry) and commanded the New Zealand contingent at the coronation of George VI in 1937. He was a major when the Second World War broke out, and joined the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force as a lieutenant colonel in January 1940. He had a reputation as a disciplinarian, which some men under his command appreciated while others did not. Another New Zealand VC recipient, Keith Elliott, appreciated that Andrew wanted his men to be prepared so trained his men rigorously. His nickname among the New Zealanders was 'Old February'.

Andrew took command of the 22nd Wellington Battalion, which served in Britain in 1940, and subsequently in Greece, Crete and in North Africa. Evacuated from Greece on 25 April 1941, Andrew commanded his men in the defence of Maleme airfield on Crete in May. His position was Point 107, the hill that dominated the airfield. When the German attacks began on 20 May, he later recalled that the barrages his men were subjected to were worse than what he had experienced at Passchendaele, Messines and the Somme. He described those Great War barrages he'd endured as "mere picnics" in comparison.

Andrew requested assistance from the 23rd Battalion but was left without support for 24 hours, after which he reluctantly withdrew his men because he risked being overrun. The Germans took Point 107, and the airfield fell to them soon after. For this withdrawal Andrew was blamed for the loss of Crete, and he never again held an operational command (although he remained in command of 22nd Battalion).

Andrew's role in the loss of Crete remains controversial, however, and others blame the commander of 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, Brigadier James Hargest, for refusing to provide the requested support. Other officers of the brigade must also share the blame.

"AS SOON AS THEY GOT CLOSE ENOUGH THE INTREPID QUARTET THREW BOMBS AT THE CREW AND RUSHED, KILLED FOUR OF THE ENEMY AND PUT THE REST TO FLIGHT, AND CAPTURED THE GUN AND THE POSITION"

War Correspondent Malcolm Ross

There was an inquiry on the loss of Crete, at which both Andrew and Hargest gave evidence, but no conclusive finding was made. The commander of New Zealand forces on Crete, Major General Bernard Freyberg, did not place any blame on Andrew.

Evacuated to North Africa, Andrew again showed his qualities during Operation Crusader in November and December 1941, when, after the headquarters had been overrun and the officers captured, he commanded the remnants of the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade for 14 days at Menastir and Bardia. Brigadier Hargest was captured on 27 November, and Andrew took command, fighting at the southeast end of the corridor to Tobruk against the Afrika Korps. During that time the brigade saw off repeated attacks by the 21st Panzer Division. Andrew was Mentioned in Dispatches and later awarded a Distinguished Service Order. He relinquished command of the brigade on 7 December, after Erwin Rommel had abandoned Tobruk.

In February 1942 Andrew relinquished command of 22nd Battalion and returned to New Zealand to oversee preparations for a potential Japanese invasion at Wellington Fortress Area. He resumed service with the regular New Zealand Army in October 1943 and was promoted to colonel. After the war he was promoted to brigadier (he used to quip that he had held every rank from private to brigadier – with the exception of quartermaster sergeant). He was appointed aide-de-camp to the governor general of New Zealand in 1946.

After retirement in 1952, Andrew resisted calls to stand as a politician. He had married his wife Bessie on 12 November 1918, the day after the Armistice, and they had five children and lived in Levin, in New Zealand. When he died in 1969, three Victoria Cross recipients attended his funeral.

In December 2007, a worker at the National Army Museum, Waiouru, New Zealand, stole 96 medals, including nine Victoria Crosses awarded to New Zealand recipients (including Andrew's, as well as Charles Upham's Victoria Cross and Bar). The crime created an international outcry and was dubbed a 'crime against the nation'. At that time, a total of 24 Victoria Crosses had been stolen and only one (a Canadian award) had been recovered, 31 years after its theft. A huge international effort to recover the New Zealand medals was launched. A reward was posted by Lord Michael Ashcroft and New Zealand businessman Tom Sturgess, and all of the 96 medals were recovered in February 2008, but the culprits remained at large. The smash-and-grab theft had only taken four minutes, so more than one perpetrator was sought. One man was apprehended and pleaded guilty in September 2009 while another man remained at large until August 2011.

Andrew's Victoria Cross is now once again on (much more secure) display in the National Army Museum, Waiouru.



A British 18-pounder is recovered from the mud of Passchendaele. Guns like this provided vital support and barrage cover for the Wellingtons' advance



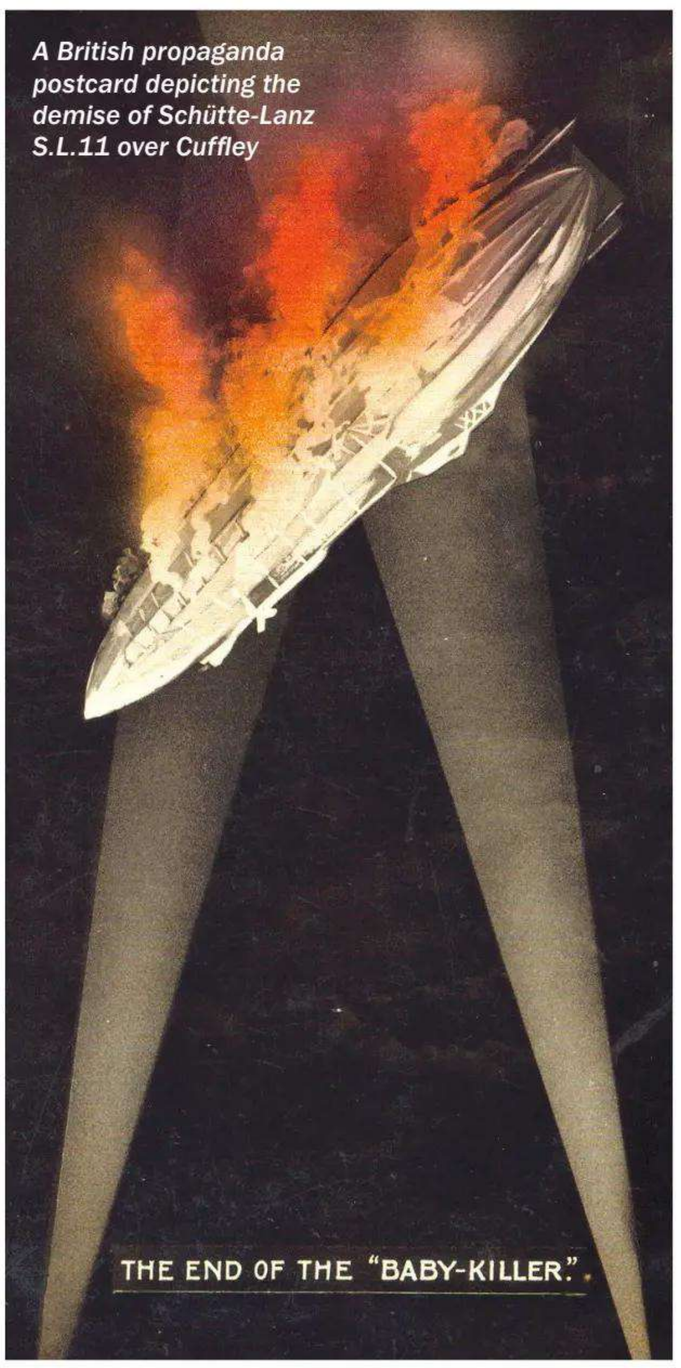
WILLIAM LEEFE ROBINSON

Britain's war-weary population was given a night to remember when an RFC airman shot down a German airship over Hertfordshire in 1916. The 21-year-old pilot became a national sensation and epitomised the glamour of Britain's early airmen

WORDS **BETH WYATT**

In the early hours of 3 September 1916, the villagers of Cuffley, Hertfordshire, gathered for an unexpected spectacle. A German airship had been shot out of the sky, and an inferno had quickly taken its place. 16 men lay dead inside, but for the villagers this was a scene of unabashed celebration – at last one of the feared German Zeppelins (as they believed the airship to be) had been shot down by Britain's valiant defenders, the pilots of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). This night would not only be imprinted on those who watched it unfold, but also on the man responsible for the jubilation. William Leefe Robinson – a humble, young pilot serving in 39 Squadron – was transformed into a national treasure overnight after becoming the first person to shoot down an enemy airship over Britain. For this incredible feat he was awarded the Victoria Cross – the fastest to have ever been issued.

Robinson was not a man preordained to achieve glory in the skies. The Royal Military College, Sandhurst graduate's Great War service began as a second lieutenant with the 5th Militia Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment. But he soon became restless, with his role centering on preparing soldiers for the front. Raymond Laurence Rimell, a biographer of Robinson, argued that, "There seems little reason to suppose that Robinson had any great ambition for flying, the subject was never raised in correspondence, more likely the tedium of his position was such that he fired off as many applications as possible and took the first one offered him". On 29 March 1915, Robinson commenced his new career as an observer with 4 Squadron of the RFC. Six months later, on 18 September, he was promoted to flying officer, having earned his wings after a spell of recuperation in England due to a shrapnel wound received in France.



A British propaganda postcard depicting the demise of Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 over Cuffley

On the night of 2 September 1916, Robinson was on duty at Sutton's Farm airfield, Hornchurch, Essex, where he was stationed with 39 Squadron. *The Times*, recalling the extraordinary events of 2 September in the issue of 11 April 1917, wrote that the pilot "was attached to various stations in England for night flying, and before the exploit for which the King awarded him the V.C. had been up on every occasion of a raid in the neighbourhood of London for a period of seven months."

The warning on 2 September that an enemy raid over Britain was imminent came through before 5pm. The Germans' choice of evening proved off the mark: grey skies and fierce winds frosted the hulls of the 12 navy and four army airships and some were forced to return home. Only Hauptmann Wilhelm Schramm's Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 managed to reach within 11 kilometres (seven miles) of Charing Cross.

Robinson's Home Defence squadron began its defence of the capital just after 11pm. Robinson's patrol was between Hornchurch and Joyce Green, Kent. His first encounter of the night with an enemy airship was not with the ill-fated Schütte-Lanz SL11 (incorrectly labeled as a Zeppelin after the events), but with the Zeppelin L.Z.98, which had been dropping

William Leefe Robinson pictured around 1916. He was the first person to shoot down an airship over British skies

"HIS MAJESTY THE KING HAS BEEN GRACIOUSLY PLEASED TO AWARD THE VICTORIA CROSS TO THE UNDERMENTIONED OFFICER FOR MOST CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY. HE ATTACKED AN ENEMY AIRSHIP UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREAT DIFFICULTY AND DANGER, AND SENT IT CRASHING TO THE GROUND AS A FLAMING WRECK"

– Victoria Cross citation, *London Gazette*, 5 September

bombs in the Kent area. But Robinson was not in luck with this first sighting. He later wrote, "I very slowly gained on it for about ten minutes – I judged it to be about 800 feet (245 metres) below me, and I sacrificed my speed in order to keep the height. It went behind some clouds, avoided the searchlights and I lost sight of it…"

If Robinson had kept to his given patrol time, which had ended by this point, he would never have received the Victoria Cross (at least not in these circumstances). But on he continued, towards London, reasoning that the city's searchlights could assist him.

While the 21-year-old was patrolling in his B.E.2c plane, north London had become a target for Schramm's S.L.11. The commander released a succession of high-explosive bombs, but his aircraft was caught by searchlights in Finsbury and Victoria Park as it hovered above Alexandra Palace. Crowds of thousands watched in anticipation as the Finsbury anti-aircraft guns began to fire.

Robinson was one of three 39 Squadron pilots to clock the airship – along with Second Lieutenants Mackay and Hunt. However, it was Robinson who successfully gave chase. Schramm's airship vanished into clouds after turning over Tottenham, but to Robinson's advantage the S.L.11 was closer by when it reappeared. In his report of the night, the pilot wrote, "I flew about 800 feet (245 metres) below it from bow to stern and distributed one drum along it (alternate New Brock and Pomeroy). It seemed to have no effect; I therefore moved to one side and gave it another drum distributed along its side – without apparent effect. I then got behind it (by this time I was very close – 500 feet or less below) and concentrated one drum on one part (underneath rear). I was then at a height of 11,500 feet (3,505 metres) when attacking the Zeppelin.

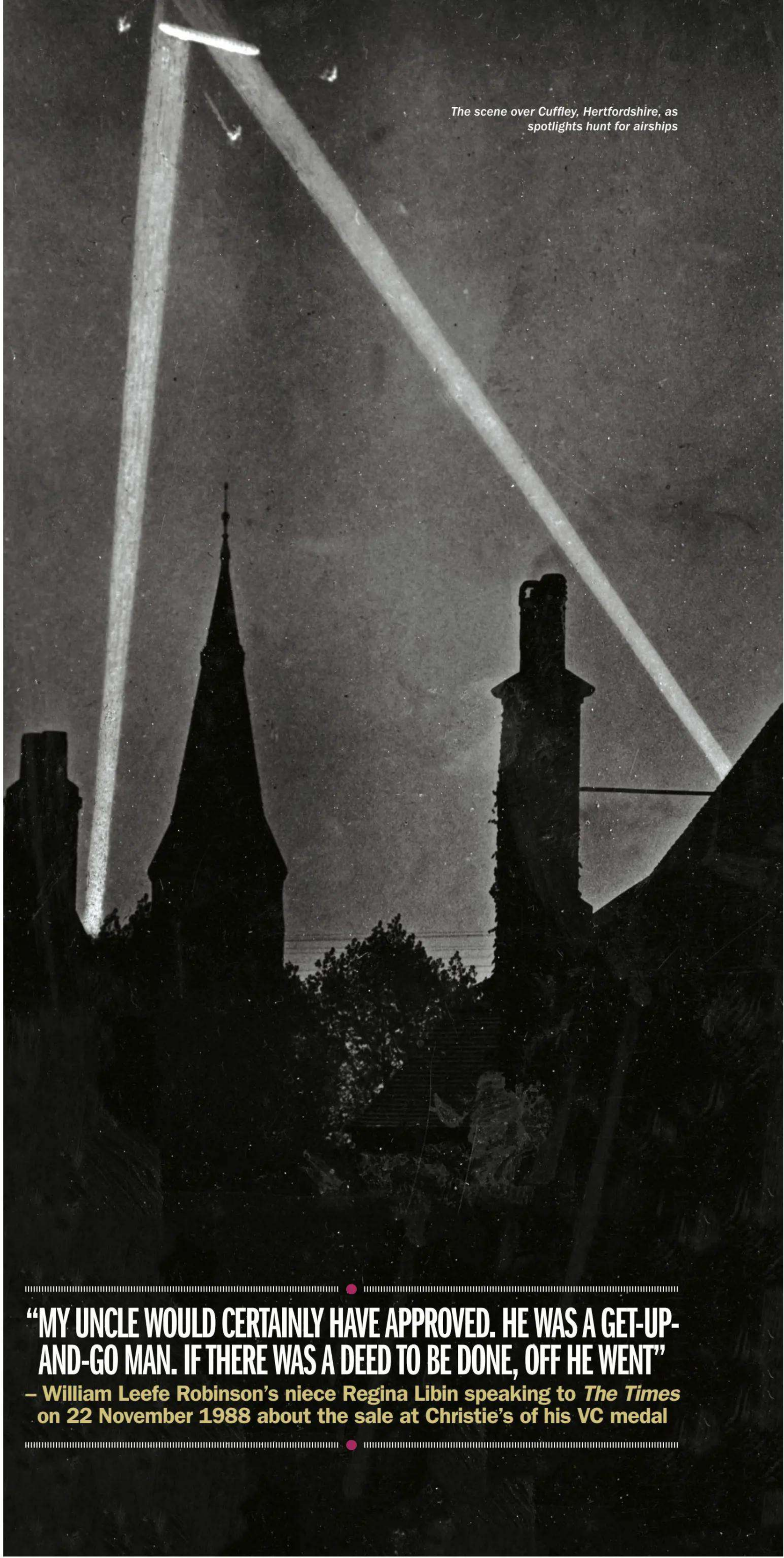
"I hardly finished the drum before I saw the part fired at glow. In a few seconds the whole rear part was blazing. When the third drum was fired there were no searchlights on the Zeppelin and no anti-aircraft was firing. I quickly got out of the way of the falling, blazing Zeppelin and being very excited fired off a few red Very's lights and dropped a parachute flare."

Robinson's combination of the popular Lewis gun and incendiary bullets succeeded when he concentrated his fire, and the fiery husk of the airship crashed into a field in Cuffley, Hertfordshire at about 2.20am on 3 September. The entire crew of 16 perished.

Living under the strain of two years of war, the public needed the morale boost Robinson's actions gave them. Thousands left their homes in the middle of the night to watch their new hero as the searchlights illuminated his chase.

Aviation historian Richard C. Smith wrote of the spectacle, in his book *Hornchurch Streets Of Heroes*: "The scene was witnessed by thousands of people within London and the surrounding areas; they cheered and sang as the airship descended in flames."

Despite the aircraft being the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11, the authorities referred to it as a Zeppelin L.21 – potentially, as the RAF Museum has suggested, to "prevent public confusion" between the different aircraft. The Schütte-Lanz was wooden-framed compared to the duralumin metal Zeppelin.



The scene over Cuffley, Hertfordshire, as spotlights hunt for airships

"MY UNCLE WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE APPROVED. HE WAS A GET-UP-AND-GO MAN. IF THERE WAS A DEED TO BE DONE, OFF HE WENT"

– William Leefe Robinson's niece Regina Libin speaking to *The Times* on 22 November 1988 about the sale at Christie's of his VC medal

Huge crowds visited the scene of the wreckage in the subsequent days. *The Times*, on 5 September, estimated that 10,000 people so far had turned up at the site. Souvenir hunters quickly descended on the site, and their spoils would turn up at community exhibitions and other occasions over the following months.

Robinson – whose actions had punctured the image of the invincible German airship – experienced a surreal 48 hours following the events; within that time he was presented with the Victoria Cross by King George V at Windsor Castle – the fastest VC to ever be issued. The pilot was approached by members of the public en masse in the street, given standing ovations in theatres and sent mail by his adoring fans, in the form of photos from actresses and letters from schoolgirls, as the Imperial War Museum's research has found. The pilot also received monetary awards from individuals and companies who had promised to reward the first airman to bring down a Zeppelin over Britain. A modest man, Robinson was somewhat embarrassed by the attention and, it seems, desperate to be sent to the front. The authorities capitulated, and he travelled to France on 17 March 1917.

"ROBINSON WAS TAKEN TO A CELL AND, FOR DISOBEYING AN 'ORDER', WAS WHIPPED TO THE POINT OF COLLAPSE"

– Norwegian pilot Tryggve Gran, Robinson's fellow prisoner in Holzminden

On 5 April, Robinson's squadron was attacked over Douai, northern France, by the 'Red Baron' Manfred von Richthofen and his men. Robinson was captured and spent the remainder of the war in prisoner of war camps. He was particularly harshly treated due to his status as the destroyer of S.L.11, and he made several unsuccessful escape attempts. By the time he returned home in December 1918 to his loved ones, including his fiancée Joan Whipple, Captain Robinson was a changed man, frail from the punishments he had suffered. To the heartbreak of the nation, he succumbed to the 'Spanish Influenza' epidemic on 31 December 1918, aged just 23.

The legacy of the people's pilot lived on in the minds of those who had celebrated his achievements, and also in the form of tangible memorials. As reported in *The Times* on 10 June 1921, the Cuffley field in which his almost-mythic status was forged became home to a granite obelisk in his memory, with the funds raised by readers of the *Daily Express*. At the unveiling, the newspaper's editor R.D. Blümenfeld expressed the admiration and gratitude they felt towards Robinson, describing the obelisk as "a spontaneous tribute to the heroism of a national figure, whose name shall live for ever".



The wreckage of the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 that was shot down on 3 September 1916

Images: Alamy, Getty



KHUDADAD KHAN

For his bravery during the First Battle of Ypres at Hollebeke, Belgium, on 31 October 1914, Sepoy Khudadad Khan became both the first Indian and the first Muslim to be awarded the Victoria Cross

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

Despite severe wounds, Sepoy Khudadad Khan continued to man the Maxim gun with five other men from his detachment from the 129th Baluchi regiment. Their British officer had already been wounded. As the men around him fell to sustained enemy fire, and despite receiving several more wounds himself, Khudadad Khan continued to man the gun until he was the sole survivor. When it was clear his position was going to be overrun, he ensured that the Maxim gun was rendered inoperable and then feigned death. After the enemy had moved on, Khudadad Khan managed to crawl back to friendly lines and seek medical attention for his wounds.

It was only in 1911 that King George V signed the Warrant extending the Victoria Cross to members of the Indian Army. Prior to that date, men of the Indian armed forces would be awarded one of the three levels of the Indian Order of Merit for gallantry. There were several incidents on the North-West Frontier in India during the 1890s where a British officer was awarded the Victoria Cross and men of the Indian army involved in the same action were awarded the Indian Order of Merit, which raised questions over extending the Victoria Cross to Indian soldiers. However, those discussions only led to a maintaining of the status quo.

The exact events surrounding the extension of the Victoria Cross in 1911 are unclear, since there was no parliamentary discussion about the issue prior to King George signing the Warrant. It was also unusual because the North-West Frontier in British India was relatively quiet at the time.

The exemption of Indian army personnel from being considered for the Victoria Cross does not seem to have been made on racial grounds – the first black person (and third Canadian) to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Seaman William Hall, had come in 1859 (for actions undertaken on 16 November 1857), while several other non-white men had been honoured subsequently in 1867 and 1892. The first opportunity for a member of the Indian army to be awarded the Victoria Cross, however, was to come during the first battle of Ypres in October 1914.

"THE BRITISH OFFICER IN CHARGE OF THE DETACHMENT HAVING BEEN WOUNDED, AND THE OTHER GUN PUT OUT OF ACTION BY A SHELL, SEPOY KHUDADAD, THOUGH HIMSELF WOUNDED, REMAINED WORKING HIS GUN UNTIL ALL THE OTHER FIVE MEN OF THE GUN DETACHMENT HAD BEEN KILLED"

London Gazette
7 December 1914

Khudadad Khan had enlisted as a sepoy (the equivalent of private) as a 25-year-old in the 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis, on 3 August 1914. The regiment was enlisting men in the North-West Frontier close to Khudadad Khan's hometown of Dab, Chakwal District, Punjab (now Pakistan). From there, the 129th moved to the Suez Canal as part of the 7th Indian (Ferozepore) Brigade and then on to France. The regiment was attached to the British Cavalry Corps at Ypres in the Gheluvelt Sector, which had been tasked with holding the line between Zandvoorde and Ploegsteert Wood (colloquially known to the British as 'Plugstreet', just as Ypres was known as 'Wipers'). On 22 October, the 129th Baluchis joined the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, as part of the 2nd Cavalry Division, commanded by Hubert Gough.

From 25 October to 13 November 1914, German forces mounted sustained assaults on the British lines in the Gheluvelt Sector where the British Cavalry Corps was stationed. Sometimes the action in which Khudadad Khan fought is termed the Battle of Gheluvelt, although it is usually considered one of the phases of the wider First Battle of Ypres.

The First Battle of Ypres came at the end of the strategic 'race to the sea' that occurred following the First Battle of the Marne in September 1914, when Allied forces halted the German advance. Before winter set in, several offensives were launched by both sides to try and outflank the other's northern flank. Following reversals at the Yser River and Langemarck, both north of Ypres, General Erich von

Khudadad Khan, painted around 1935 in a subadar's uniform. He was the first Indian to receive the Victoria Cross

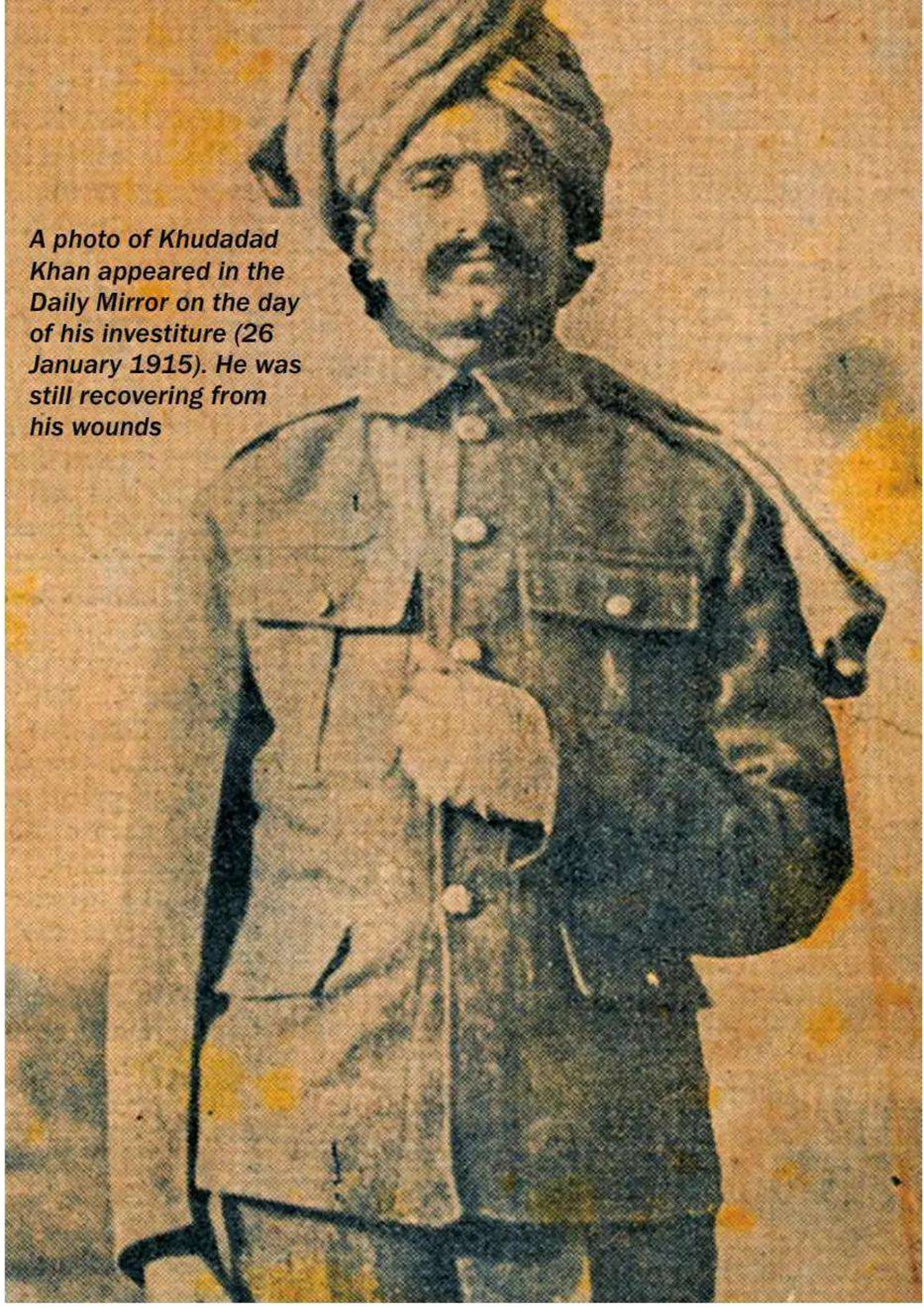
NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

Main image courtesy of National Army Museum, Chelsea, London. The museum is open daily from 10.30am-5.30pm (8pm on the first Wednesday of every month).

For more information: www.nam.ac.uk



A photograph of the 129th Baluchis marching near Hollebeke in October 1914. This photo was taken before the actions of 31 October, when the unit suffered heavy casualties



A photo of Khudadad Khan appeared in the Daily Mirror on the day of his investiture (26 January 1915). He was still recovering from his wounds

"THE GERMAN ATTACK BROKE UPON THIS LINE ON THE 30TH OCTOBER, AND DURING THE BATTLE THAT FOLLOWED THE ODDS AGAINST US HERE WERE 6 TO 1"

Beatrix Brice, *The Battle Book of Ypres* (London, 1927)

Falkenhayn, chief of the German General Staff, the Oberste Heeresleitung, ordered a new force under General Max von Fabeck to attack towards Ypres beginning on 29 October.

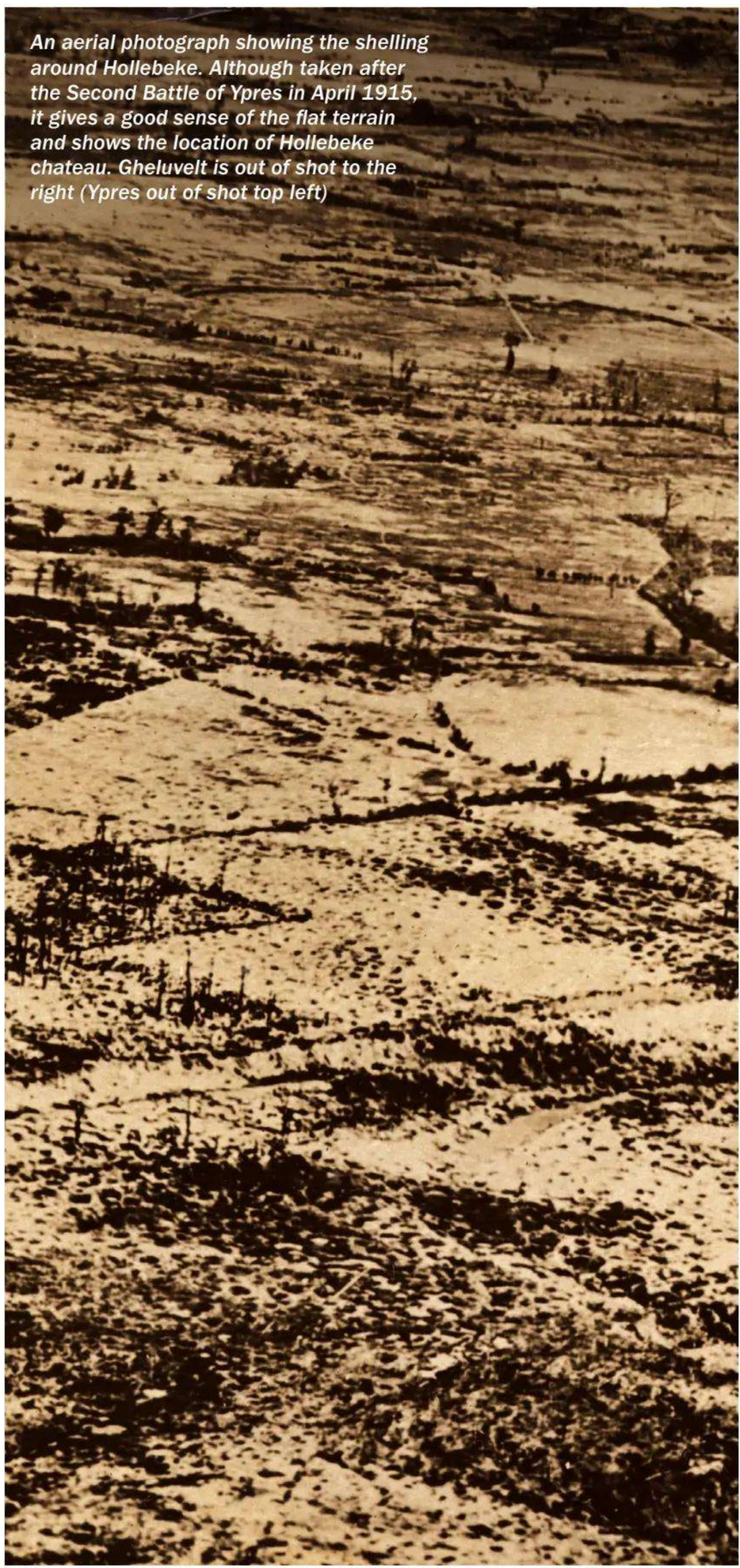
The 129th Baluchis had relieved the 4th Queen's Own Hussars at Hollebeke and so, with British and Indian officers, the Baluchis faced the sustained attacks of Armeegruppe Fabeck and were severely outnumbered. Estimates state that the 129th was outnumbered by as much as six to one.

The German attacks came to within three kilometres (two miles) of Ypres and pushed the Allied forces out of Hollebeke and its surrounds, although they then rallied and held the line 915 metres (1,000 yards) to the rear, especially with the help of French reinforcements and six battalions organised by Sir Edward Bulfin, known as 'Bulfin's Force'. Renewed attacks by the German forces broke through the thin 3rd Cavalry Brigade's lines again on 31 October, although the Germans were once again forced back by a successful counterattack from the infantry of the 2nd Worcestershire Regiment.

It was during the initial breakthrough by German forces on 31 October that Khudadad Khan's gallantry occurred. The dismounted cavalry were thinly spread across their designated area, and they gathered into small detachments that made use of shallow trenches and some remaining buildings (in which they withstood the incessant enemy bombardment). Due to the waterlogged ground, the trenches could not be dug any deeper. We know that there were also Baluchi troops holding the line at Wytschaete southwest of Hollebeke, suggesting just how thinly spread the Allied forces were.

Sepoy Khudadad Khan was part of a detachment of 12 men of the 129th Baluchis under the command of a British officer, manning the two Maxim guns that were attached to the regiment. It would seem that this officer was Lieutenant K.C. North, who on 30 October (and presumably with Sepoy Khudadad Khan) had delayed the German advance for an hour and a half with these two guns, inflicting massive casualties, and finally withdrawing the guns by wheelbarrow only when their ammunition was expended. It is difficult to make clear sense of some of the sources, however, since although North is named as the officer in charge of the Baluchi machine guns at Hollebeke on 30 October (and we are told he died the following day), no mention is made of Khudadad Khan's actions in connection with him. North is also not named as the injured officer in accounts of Khudadad Khan's actions.

Early on 31 October the Germans renewed their attacks, and the first Maxim gun was destroyed by an enemy shell, which also wounded the Baluchi British officer, possibly Lieutenant North, and left him incapacitated. Khudadad Khan and his companions then manned the other gun and kept it firing until all but Khudadad Khan were dead. The five other men all received posthumous awards for gallantry. Before his position was overrun, Khudadad spiked his Maxim gun, ensuring that



An aerial photograph showing the shelling around Hollebeke. Although taken after the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915, it gives a good sense of the flat terrain and shows the location of Hollebeke chateau. Gheluvelt is out of shot to the right (Ypres out of shot top left)

it could not be turned on his own men. He then feigned death until the Germans moved on, and then that night, after they were pushed back, he was able to crawl back to his own lines despite the multiple wounds he had received.

During the action 164 Baluchis were killed or wounded (another source claims this number was as high as 200) – one-third of their total force – as well as six Indian officers and six British officers. Estimates of British losses in the Gheluvelt Sector put their strength on the evening of 31 October at one-quarter of what it had been before the battle started in mid-October. Estimates for losses during the First Battle of Ypres from 14 October to 30 November vary, but it is estimated the British suffered between 55,000-58,000 casualties, the French 80,000-86,000, and 20,000 Belgians, while there were 134,000 German casualties – all for very little territorial gain on either side.

Khudadad Khan was initially treated for his wounds in France but was then sent for recovery to the Indian Convalescent Home in Hampshire. His wounds were so severe that he missed the first planned investiture for his award. It was probably intended that he be presented with his Victoria Cross at GHQ in Saint-Omer on 5 December 1914, since it was there that Darwan Singh Negi was invested. Singh had also been severely wounded and was gazetted for his Victoria Cross in the same edition as Khudadad Khan. Darwan Singh Negi, of the 39th Garhwal Rifles, ranks as the second Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross (for his actions of at Festubert on 23-24 November 1914). It is interesting to note that Singh was presented his award on 5 December but that it only appeared in the *London Gazette* on 7 December.

King George V presented several other Victoria Crosses in the field in France in early December – at least three on 1 and 3 December – but the presentation at GHQ on 5 December suggests that the first presentation to an Indian was considered an important event, especially since it had been King George who signed the Warrant extending the award of the Victoria Cross. Khudadad Khan was simply too badly wounded to take part and so the award was presented to Singh alone, even though he too was badly wounded (a photo from 23 December shows him being evacuated by stretcher).

The idea that this medal in particular was important is reinforced by the fact that when Khudadad Khan was recovered enough to receive his cross in late January 1915, he was front-page news in the *Daily Mirror*, with the headline, "The first Indian to win the Victoria Cross". King George may have been aware of the great debt the British Empire owed to the more than 1 million Indians who had volunteered to fight in Europe.

After recovering from his wounds, Khudadad Khan returned to his unit, being promoted to jamadar (lieutenant) in 1917 and senior jamadar in 1918. He was later promoted to subadar (captain). He went on to work as a farmer after leaving the army. He died in Rawalpindi in 1971 aged 82.

In many ways, Khudadad Khan and Darwan Singh Negi, as well as the nine other Indian Victoria Cross recipients from World War I, represent the 1.3 million Indians who volunteered to fight for Britain during the war. Of these, 400,000 were Muslim. These Indian forces suffered almost 60,000 casualties on the Western Front alone, with 8,500 killed, almost half of those Muslim. Their contribution to the war effort in both world wars and other theatres is one that is sadly too often overlooked.

Despite efforts to familiarise people with Khudadad Khan's actions during the centenary of the First Battle of Ypres in 2014, and adding his name to National Memorial Arboretum, his actions deserve to be more widely recognised.





A contemporary illustration of Khudadad Khan's gallant action at Hollebeke



ROWLAND BOURKE

Rejected for poor eyesight when he tried to enlist, Rowley Bourke rescued over 40 men on two separate occasions at Ostend in April and May 1918

WORDS **FRANK JASTRZEMBSKI**

Some men pass through life inconspicuously, while others rise to the occasion in the moments when they are needed most. Coningsby Dawson, a Canadian novelist and officer during the First World War, said that war is a "test of internals, of the heart and spirit of a man". He pointed out that these attributes were more important than anything else a man could possess on the battlefield. In the same letter, he offered a fellow Canadian, Rowland Bourke, as a prime example of a man whose heart and spirit made up for everything that he physically lacked. Ridiculed by his neighbours for wanting to enlist, Dawson said that Bourke "elbowed his way through their laughter to self-conquest" and saved over 40 lives during the two raids on Ostend in 1918.

Born in London in November 1885, Rowland Richard Louis Bourke – known as 'Rowley' among family and friends – moved to the remote Yukon territory in 1902. His father, Dr. Isadore McWilliam Bourke, a retired surgeon of the 72nd Highlanders, established the first hospital in Dawson City during the Klondike Gold Rush. After a stint as a gold miner, Rowley Bourke turned to farming. He founded a fruit farm with two of his cousins on Kootenay Lake near Nelson, British Columbia.

One day while clearing the land, an explosion killed one of his cousins, Cecil. It also severely wounded Rowley, and he lost sight in one eye and damaged the other. He left the farm after the accident for a short time, but returned, and later operated his own motor launch.

When World War I erupted Rowley Bourke felt it was his duty to enlist. Besides the injuries he had suffered to his eyes, he was not the kind of person that immediately inspired confidence or looked the part of a soldier. An enormous pair of glasses dangled from his face, and he was described as "the kind of chap with whom girls danced out of kindness. Today he's a hero".

"I remember the way his neighbours used to patronise him before the war," Dawson recalled. "They all laughed when he went to California to study for an aeroplane pilot. They didn't try to join themselves, but his keenness struck them as funny. What could a man who was half-blind do at the war, they asked – a man who ran his launch into logs on the lake and who crashed in full daylight when approaching a wharf?"

Every attempt he made to enlist was turned down. "When he had been awarded his flying certificate at the American Air School our RFC [Royal Flying Corps] refused to take him," Dawson recalled. "He tried to get into the infantry, into everything, anything, and was universally turned down on the score of weak sight." After being rejected by the Royal Flying Corps, he travelled to England at his own expense. Possibly due to an oversight, he was accepted into the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. "Everyone pictured him colliding with everything solid that came his way."

"BEFORE THE WAR HE WAS THE KIND OF CHAP WITH WHOM GIRLS DANCED OUT OF KINDNESS. TODAY HE'S A HERO"

But Arthur R.M. Lower, a naval officer who served with Bourke, knew that there was something special about him. He said that different men faced danger in different ways. Some couldn't handle it and cracked, while others thrived in it. He observed that Bourke had "no physical sense of fear at all" and said that he "was exhilarated by it. Danger to him was a tonic." He observed in one instance, during an air raid on Dunkirk, Bourke casually walked in the direction of an exploding small-arms store, exclaiming, "This is splendid, this is war. How glad I am to have been sent here, where you really see there is a war on."

Bourke would have a chance to prove his mettle after he persuaded his commander to allow him to partake in a daring raid targeting the Belgian harbours of Ostend and Zeebrugge in 1918. The raid would cripple the ports, which 30 German submarines and the same number of destroyers and torpedo boats had been using as a base to conduct hit-and-run raids and terrorise Allied ships. During the worst period of the submarine raids, in the spring of 1917, the sea was literally covered with the debris of sunken British and French ships.

Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes, leader of the Dover Patrol, commanded the operation. His fleet was made up of an odd assortment of ships whose task was to protect Allied transports and supplies travelling to France. Keyes planned to launch simultaneous raids on Ostend and Zeebrugge from his bases at Dover and Dunkirk. He would deliberately scuttle a

ROWLAND BOURKE

Rowland Bourke (pictured here during WWI) ended his naval career in 1950. He attained the rank of commander serving with the Royal Canadian Navy

"IT WASN'T HIS EYESIGHT AND LIMITATIONS THAT REALLY COUNTED – IT WAS HIS KEENNESS"

– Coningsby Dawson

"DANGER TO HIM WAS A TONIC"

– Arthur R.M. Lower

handful of old cruisers to block access in and out of the harbours and canals.

The 32-year-old Bourke commanded ML 276, one of the 59 British and French ships dedicated to the Ostend operation. Two 3,400-ton cruisers, HMS Brilliant and HMS Sirius, would make the one-way trip to Ostend. Two of the 20 motor launches taking part in the mission, ML 283 and ML 532, had orders to rescue the survivors from the ships once they had been scuttled. Bourke's motor launch was to follow close behind in case either of them was knocked out during the action.

At midnight on 23 April 1918, Keyes's two cruisers moved forward, escorted by two destroyers. Some of the motor launches deployed a smoke screen to provide cover for the cruisers, but it was blown back by the wind and exposed the ships to the German shore batteries. The Germans had purposely repositioned a marker buoy that had protected ships from running aground on a drifting sandbank. Both ships inadvertently ran aground on this sandbank 1,800 metres (1,970 yards) short of their objective. They were abandoned by their crews as they came under heavy machine gun and artillery fire. A German gunnery officer recalled seeing tiny figures sliding down ropes and into the awaiting motor launches, some men slipping and falling into the water during the frantic scramble to safety.

ML 532 was suddenly hit by a German shell that carried away its bow from keel to deck and stunned its crew. The blast damaged both engines, and it remained immobilised. Bourke, with ML 276, raced ahead in the darkness towards the Brilliant to continue rescuing survivors. They were guided by the bright rays coming from the German searchlights and the exploding German shells. Paying no attention to the German machine gun bullets pinging off his craft and the shells crashing dangerously close by, Bourke pulled ML 276 as near as he could to the marooned Brilliant. He crammed as many men as he could fit into his motor launch, making four trips back and forth to take 38 officers and men to safety.

On his fifth trip, Bourke towed the disabled ML 532 out of harm's way despite his motor launch being badly damaged. Commander Ion Hamilton Benn, who directed the ML flotilla, had caught Bourke's attention by signaling 'SOS' from ML 532. One rope after another broke, but Bourke managed to tow the disabled motor launch about halfway back to Dunkirk. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order following the raid.

A second attempt to block Ostend took place a few weeks later. Commander Alfred Edmund Godsal and Lieutenant Commander H.N.M. Hardy, who both commanded the ships in the first raid, convinced Keyes to give it another try. Some thought it was suicidal to attempt it again, but there was no shortage of volunteers. HMS Vindictive, launched in 1897, moved into the harbour of Ostend on 9-10 May 1918, weighed down with concrete, to complete



A depiction of the Vindictive during the raid in 1918, fitted with mortars and howitzers and weighed down with concrete

what the Brilliant and Sirius had failed to do. HMS Sappho was supposed to accompany the Vindictive, but it blew a hole in one of its boilers on its way from Dunkirk and had to be left behind. The Vindictive, commanded by Godsal, would go alone.

The Vindictive had trouble finding its way through a dense fog that suddenly appeared, limiting its sight to about 275 metres (300 yards). Guided by a flare lit by a motor boat, the Vindictive moved forward as British aeroplanes dropped bombs to provide cover. Every German shore battery opened up on the lone ship. Godsal was killed when a German shell hit the tower. Lieutenant Commander Victor Crutchley, who took over, managed to pull the ship close to where they wanted it, detonating the 680 kilograms (1,500 pounds) of amatol, and ordering the men to abandon the ship. "There was a fearful din on the upper deck, as well as shrapnel," Engineer Commander W.A. Bury recalled. As they raced to escape the ship, "the machine gun bullets were making a noise just like pneumatic caulkers". Crutchley and those not wounded tried to keep the ship afloat long enough so everyone could be evacuated.

The two motor launches closest to the ship, ML 254 and ML 276, came to the rescue of the Vindictive's crew. ML 254, under the command of Lieutenant Geoffrey Drummond, picked up 41 survivors, including Crutchley. Drummond was severely wounded in the leg, and his second-in-command, Lieutenant Gordon Ross, and two other men were killed. He was hit by two machine gun bullets from a pier 18 metres (20 yards) away and fainted from loss of blood, but his crippled launch made it back to the HMS Warwick. Drummond would later receive the Victoria Cross.

"THE BRAVEST OF ALL HOLDERS OF THE VICTORIA CROSS"
– Admiral Keyes

Crutchley had no way of knowing it at the time, but three more men remained behind. Wounded in the same blast that killed Godsal, Lieutenant John Alleyne and two men helplessly clung to an upended skiff in the water. ML 276 had been raking a nearby pier with a Lewis gun when Bourke ordered it to the wreckage to make sure that Drummond didn't miss any survivors. He was getting ready to leave when he heard the stranded men's cries. At first, he couldn't spot anyone after moving to the rear of the Vindictive. He came back a second time, this time pulling ML 276 to the opposite side of the ship. Each time he came near the wreckage he attracted heavy enemy fire.

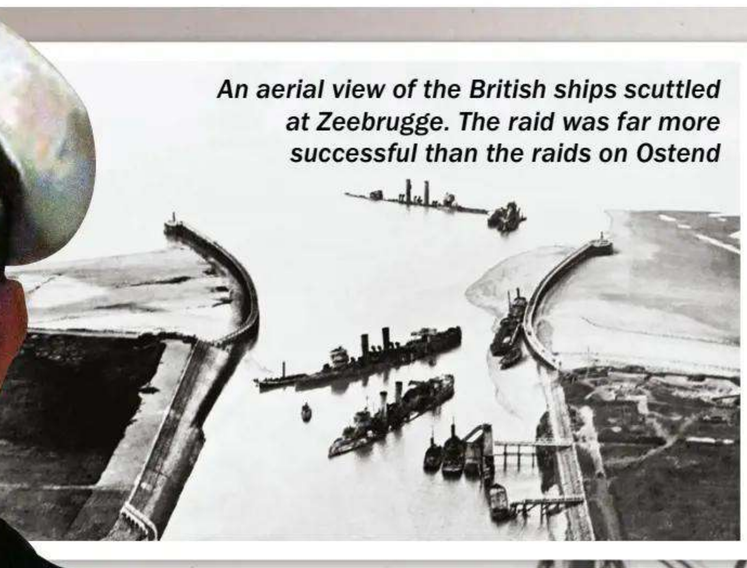
He discovered Alleyne and the two men hanging onto the skiff. While rescuing them, two of Bourke's crew were killed by a German six-inch shell, but they managed to pull the men from the water and escape. ML 276, badly damaged, was towed to Dunkirk by another British vessel. "I examined her next morning," Commander Benn recalled, "and found the mast had been shot away about 7 foot (2.1 metres) from the deck and there were 55 holes in her between wind and water." On later inspection, they discovered that its petrol tank had at least 12 holes in it and was leaking.

The Ostend raid didn't have the success that Keyes had hoped for, but it did temporarily delay the German raids. Those who took part in the operation were applauded for their valour and sacrifice. "To praise the skill and gallantry of the adventure would be impertinent," journalist Leslie Cope Cornford wrote, "Such deeds are immortal".

A total of 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded to men who took part in the Ostend and Zeebrugge raids – the same number awarded to the defenders of Rorke's Drift. Bourke was praised for his "daring and skill" and "bravery and perseverance". He was awarded the Victoria Cross. Admiral Keyes afterwards called Bourke the "bravest of all holders of the Victoria Cross".

Bourke returned to civilian life after the war and worked as a clerk. He enlisted a second time in 1941 and served in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve during World War II. He lived at the same address in Esquimalt with his wife Rosalind for 26 years, until his death on 29 August 1958 at the age of 72. Misjudged by his neighbours, Bourke demonstrated that it isn't what is on the outside that matters, but rather what is inside the person that counts.

An aerial view of the British ships scuttled at Zeebrugge. The raid was far more successful than the raids on Ostend



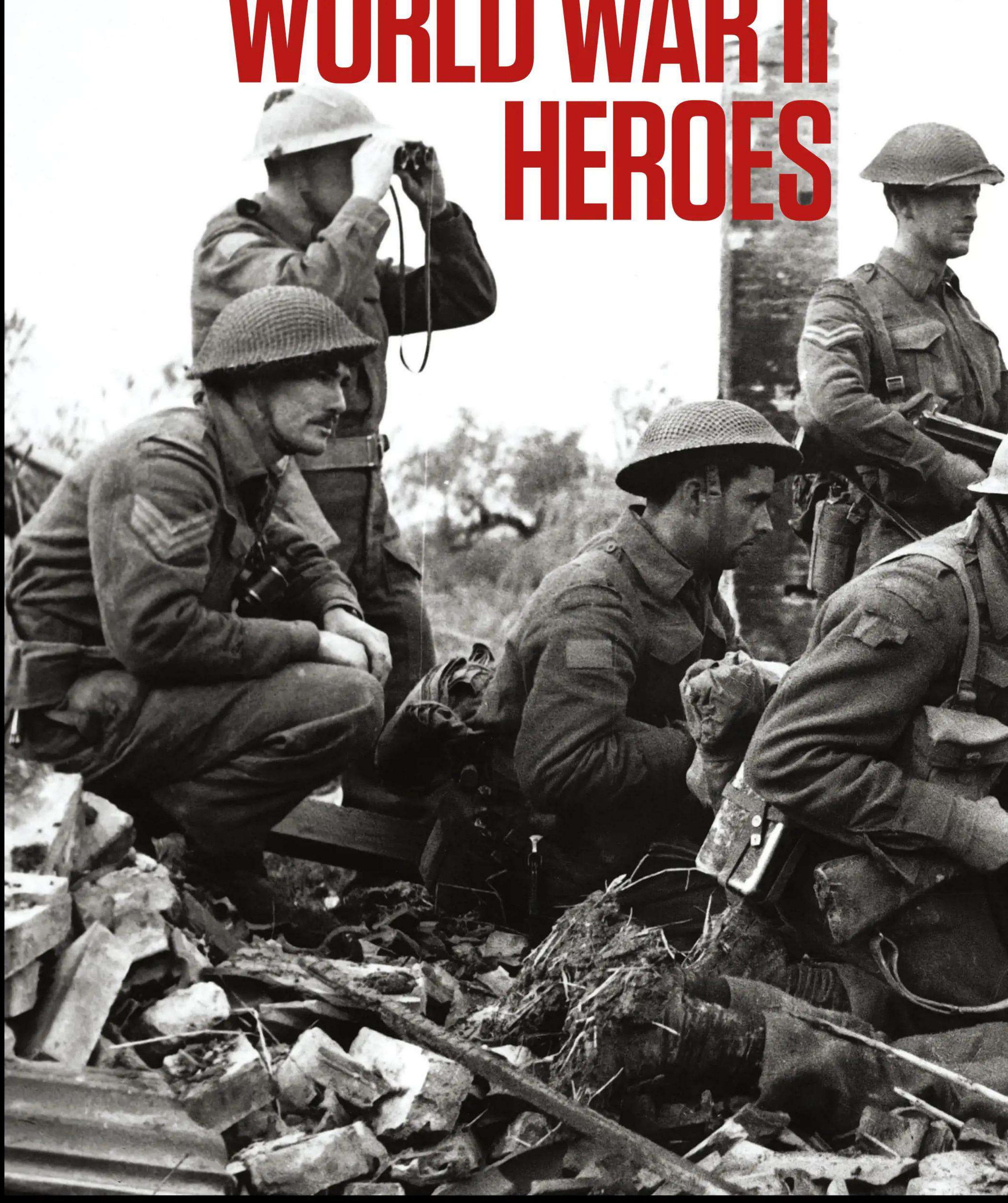
The sunken HMS Vindictive in Ostend

***Left:** Vice-Admiral Roger John Brownlow Keyes*

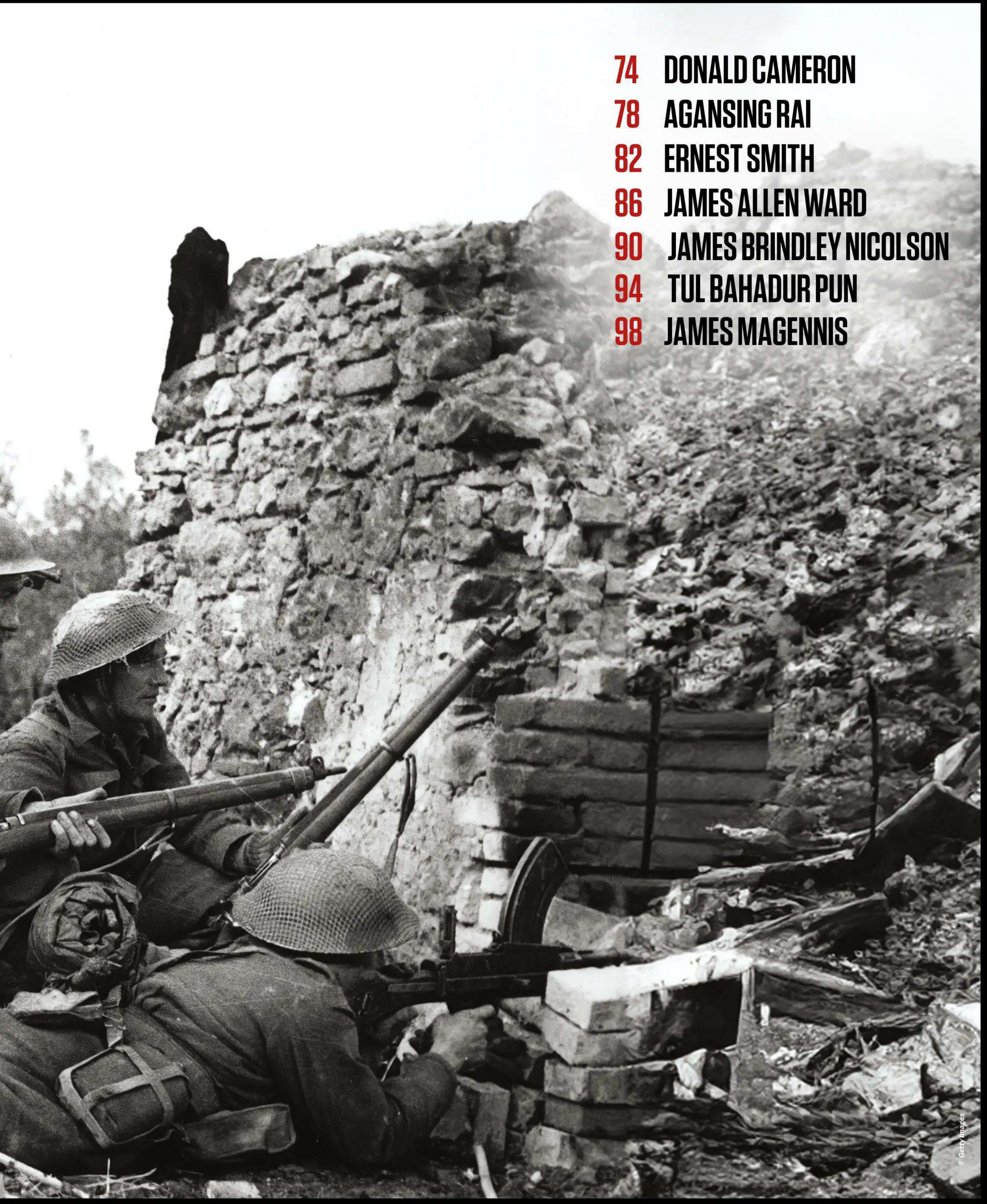
Images: Getty

1939-1945

WORLD WAR II HEROES



74 DONALD CAMERON
78 AGANSING RAI
82 ERNEST SMITH
86 JAMES ALLEN WARD
90 JAMES BRINDLEY NICOLSON
94 TUL BAHADUR PUN
98 JAMES MAGENNIS



© Getty Images



DONALD CAMERON

In September 1943, as part of Operation Source, this Royal Navy Reserve lieutenant stationed his midget submarine beneath Germany's most powerful warship and laid explosive charges – with devastating results

WORDS **MARK WOOD**

Edging his midget submarine X-6 stealthily through the anti-torpedo netting in place in Kaafjord, Norway, in the wake of a small coaster, Lieutenant Donald Cameron, RNR, slowly guided his craft towards the German battleship Tirpitz at anchor in the fjord.

Cameron had begun his sea service with the Merchant Fleet, joining in 1931 at the age of 17, and in August 1939 he was accepted into the Royal Naval Reserve as a commissioned officer. Cameron was appointed navigating officer of HMS Sturgeon, assigned to the Second Submarine Flotilla in November 1940, having recently married Eve Kilpatrick of the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Selected for 'special service' with X-craft, the Royal Navy's new midget submarines, Cameron was appointed first lieutenant of XE3, the prototype in build at that time in Southampton. X-3 was launched on 15 March 1942 and commenced trials at Portsmouth and Portland prior to relocating to Scotland for further tests and crew training. Cameron transferred to Loch Bannatyne, Isle of Bute, headquarters of 12 Submarine Flotilla (X-craft) in September and at the close of 1942 was selected as commanding officer X-6.

The X-craft was developed from the prototype design of Commander Cromwell Hanford Varley DSC, RN, an experienced submariner of the Great War and pioneer of the original 'human torpedo' project of 1909. Accepted into service in 1939, the X design, crewed by four officers and ratings, was 52ft (16m) in length with a beam of 5.7ft (1.75m), displacing 30 tons and armed with two 4,400lb (1,996kg) detachable amatol charges, which were to be placed below the target. X-craft had a limited sub-surface range and were intended to be towed to the target area by a 'mother' submarine, usually a Royal Navy S or T class vessel, which would then rendezvous after completion of the attack and tow the X-craft back to its home port.



***Right:** The midget submarine X-6 during training exercises off the coast of Scotland*

The sinking of the German battleship Bismarck by the Royal Navy in May 1941 left its sister ship Tirpitz as the most powerful warship afloat. Despite several aborted operations against Allied convoys carrying war materiel and equipment to the Soviet ports of Archangel and Murmansk, Tirpitz, joined by Scharnhorst in March 1943, presented an existential threat to the convoy system in northern waters.

Concerned by this ever-present danger, Prime Minister Winston Churchill tasked Admiral Sir Max Horton, Flag Officer Submarines, with neutralising the danger lurking in Norwegian waters. Operation Source, an ambitious plan to destroy Tirpitz, Scharnhorst and the pocket battleship Lutzow was conceived by Horton, who delegated the planning to Commander Varley and his team. Varley set about devising an operation utilising the new X-craft to penetrate the defensive screen around the warships and cripple or destroy them with explosives.

Weather conditions forecast for the Norwegian fjords appeared most favourable between 20-25 September, so the 19th of the month was the last feasible date to tow the X-craft out to Norwegian waters and detach them with their operational crew in place. Four S class and two T class submarines were earmarked to tow the six X-craft, and on the 11 September the

Images: Alamy, Getty

Lieutenant Donald Cameron during preparations for Operation Source

"TIRPITZ, JOINED BY SCHARNHORST IN MARCH 1943, PRESENTED AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO THE CONVOY SYSTEM IN NORTHERN WATERS"

midget submarines commenced their journey from a position 75 miles (121km) west of the Shetland Islands. In the early evening light of 21 September, Cameron guided X-6 through the coastal minefields and took up station off the Brattholm Islands at the entrance of Kaafjord to await the start of the operation.

Cameron's crew were experienced hands consisting of Lieutenant John Lorimer as first lieutenant, Sub Lieutenant Richard Kendall and Engine Room Artificer Edmund Goddard as engineer. Tirpitz was screened by two torpedo nets and Cameron considered deception to be his only chance of passing through these nets. On 22 September, as the sun began to set, a netting boom opened to admit a small coaster returning inebriated German sailors back on board after an evening ashore – Cameron seized the opportunity and steered X-6 close behind to within 10ft (3m) of the vessel before the boom closed. His luck, however, was about to change. The periscope and gyroscope of X-6 malfunctioned at this crucial juncture and the midget submarine struck an uncharted sub-surface rock formation, forcing it to momentarily surface – alerting observant sentries onboard Tirpitz to its presence.

Despite these setbacks, Cameron was able to position X-6 beneath Tirpitz and off-load the primed amatol charges directly below the German warship. It was obvious to the crew of X-6 that there would be no escape, having already attracted sustained gunfire from the small arms of the sentries and the ship's 0.8in (20mm) flak 30 secondary armament. Cameron made the decision to open the sea-cocks, scuttling the vessel before he and his crew were retrieved from the water and taken prisoner. Lorimer recalled after the war that as they boarded Tirpitz under guard, he asked Cameron: "Skipper, shall we salute the quarterdeck?" "Why, of course," Cameron replied, which they did – to the astonishment of the German sailors.

Likewise X-7, commanded by Lieutenant Godrey Place, had managed to lay its charges. However, having been depth-charged the midget submarine sank, taking two of the crew down with it. Place was taken prisoner. Realising that his ship was in mortal danger Kapitan zur See Hans Meyer ordered a starboard turn from the ship's stern using the anchor and mooring cables. This was the only possible course of action given that building sufficient steam pressure to sail out of danger would take at least an hour.

Meyer's desperate actions were too late. At 8.12am two huge explosions occurred almost simultaneously. Tirpitz was seen to lift some three feet out of the water as an oil tank ruptured and armour plating buckled in the force of the blast. The double bottom of the ship was lacerated and 1400 tonnes of freezing water gushed in, flooding both generator compartments, rendering all but one turbo generator inoperative and disrupting all electrical power. Two of the large 15in (380mm) gun turrets were displaced from their mountings and the shafts of the screws were damaged, while two of the ship's four Arado seaplanes were blown overboard. Most operational mounted equipment such as range finders and fire control instruments were destroyed and all radars failed. Tirpitz was by this point listing 30 degrees and two generator vessels were ordered to proceed immediately to the aid of the stricken vessel. After consultations with the Führer, Commander in Chief of the Kriegsmarine Karl Doenitz instructed maintenance teams that repairs were to be carried out in situ. Due to the extensive damage, most notably the buckling of the frame beams, which would require


The Daily Telegraph 4 A.M.

MAJOR SOVIET VICTORY AT KRIVOI ROG

TOWN AND MINE AREA TAKEN BY STORM

GERMANS LOSE MAIN DNIEPER BEND BASE

RUSSIANS 10 MILES FROM DNO: DRIVING ON LATVIA

PREMIER WARNS GERMANS OF COMING BLOWS

ASSAULT BY LAND, SEA AND AIR

INCLUDE U.S. FORCE TO OPEN INVASION

BRITAIN'S X-CRAFT: THE MIDGET SUBMARINE

V.C.s FOR BLOW AT TIRPITZ IN MIDGET SUBMARINES

50 MILES UP FJORD GUARDED BY NETS AND GUNS

U.S. START 2-WAY AIR RAIDS ON GERMANY

RECORD BOMBER FORCE STRIKES FROM ITALY

FIGHTER FACTORIES AND AIRFIELDS POUNDED

STALIN WRITES TO ROOSEVELT

POLISH PROBLEM NOT MENTIONED

NAZIS PREPARE AFTER ANZIO FAILURE

ROCKET SHELLS IN LONDON RAID LAST NIGHT

27,000 NAZIS KILLED AT KORSUN

LATE NEWS

Did you MACLEAN your teeth to-day?

LEODIAN

***Above:** The Daily Telegraph reports the success of the midget submarine force during Operation Source*

The mighty Tirpitz in Kaafjord, March 1943. It was by this point the most powerful warship afloat



Cameron (right) at his investiture, Buckingham Palace, June 1945. Godrey Place stands to the left

many months of repair in dry dock, it was considered that Tirpitz could not be returned to complete seaworthiness.

Undeterred, specialists from the repair and supply vessel Neumarck and technical personnel drawn from the crew of Tirpitz managed to effectively repair the vessel within six months. The Allies still viewed Tirpitz as a significant risk in northern waters and on 22 November 1944 the vessel was sunk by a force of 32 Lancaster bombers of 9 and 317 Squadrons using Tallboy bombs.

Cameron was held prisoner at Marlag O, a POW camp for British and Canadian Merchant and Royal Navy personnel sited northeast of Bremen. He was released in 1945. Both Cameron and Place were awarded the Victoria Cross, gazetted on 22 February 1944 and invested by King George VI at Buckingham Palace on 22 June 1945. Part of Place and Cameron's citation reads: "The courage, endurance and utter contempt for danger in the immediate face of the enemy shown by Lieutenants Place and Cameron during this determined and successful attack were supreme."

"TIRPITZ WAS SEEN TO LIFT SOME THREE FEET OUT OF THE WATER AS AN OIL TANK RUPTURED AND ARMOUR PLATING BUCKLED IN THE FORCE OF THE BLAST"

Cameron suffered from ill health after the war and died at the Royal Navy's hospital RNH Haslar at Gosport on April 10 1961. After cremation at Portchester his ashes were scattered off Portsmouth from the submarine HMS Thule three days later. In his hometown of Carluke in Lanarkshire, Scotland, a blue plaque was unveiled in May 2022 with the Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire, civil dignitaries and senior naval officers present, commemorating Cameron's achievements. At the ceremony his daughter Amanda Prideaux said: "He was very humble about it all and said he did it because he was there and I think he would always more remember those who didn't come back. As a family we feel immensely proud to be descended from such a distinguished but immensely private man."

Donald Cameron's VC resides at the Imperial War Museum as part of the Lord Ashcroft collection.

Images: Alamy, Getty



AGANSING RAI

On 26 June 1944, a Gurkha company in Burma was given the job of taking two key positions from Japanese forces. It was largely through the efforts of one man that they were successful

WORDS **DAVID SMITH**

The contribution of Gurkha regiments to the British effort during the Second World War cannot be overstated. Gurkhas won more than 2,000 medals for gallantry, including 12 Victoria Crosses. As fighting escalated to a peak in 1944, eight VCs were awarded to Gurkhas in that year alone.

Agansing Rai had joined the Indian Army in 1941 and had already been recognised for personal bravery during fighting in the Chin Hills, in early 1944, when he was awarded the Military Medal. By this time he was greatly respected in C company, 2nd battalion, Fifth Royal Gurkha Rifles. Although officially still a rifleman, he was an acting naik (equivalent to a corporal), commanding a section of ten men.

Gurkha numbers in the British armed forces had expanded dramatically over the previous years. Two or three extra battalions had been added to each of the Gurkha regiments and a total of 138,000 men served during the war. Almost 9,000 were either dead or missing when hostilities ceased.

As the main fighting strength of the South East Asia Command (SEAC), the British 14th Army mustered around 600,000 troops, around 90 percent of which were from India or Africa (Gurkhas fought in both British and Indian divisions). Under the overall command of Lieutenant General William Slim, it became known as the 'Forgotten Army', its achievements overlooked by contemporaries and in the histories that were written after the war. A total of 13 divisions comprised the 14th Army, including the 17th Indian Division, home to Rai's regiment.

As Slim's army pushed into Burma in 1944, resistance was fierce. A Japanese counter-offensive was launched in March 1944, around Assam, with the Japanese 15th Army surprising the British with the ferocity of its attack. Although this offensive had been mostly contained by the end of May, elements continued to push forward.

One such element comprised the Japanese 15th, 31st and 33rd Divisions, which soon had the British IV Corps besieged at Imphal and Kohima. The corps was made up of three divisions, including the 17th Indian Division, known as the 'Black Cats'.

Rai's regiment had taken up a defensive posture at Bishenpur, southwest of Imphal, protecting a supply route. The Japanese knew that time was not on their side, as the British could utilise their air superiority to resupply IV Corps and a relieving force was on its way. Kohima was indeed soon relieved, leaving Imphal as the only remaining option for the Japanese if their offensive were not to be a complete failure.

The final push was to be carried forward with great determination, as the orders given to the 33rd Division attest: "Now is the time to take Imphal. Regard death as something lighter than a feather. It must be expected that the division will be almost annihilated."

Against this fanatical assault, and outnumbered, the men of the 17th Indian Division grimly held their ground.

Two positions on the approach to Imphal were of great strategic importance – Mortar Bluff and Water Piquet. The two positions



***Right:** A Gurkha trooper in action in Burma, 1944, during fierce fighting against Japanese forces*

Images: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence/Louis Laurier Lyonde collection

Such was the danger he faced in the battle, Rai's VC was at first mistakenly announced as a posthumous award

"AGANSING WAS A QUIET, VERY IMPRESSIVE MAN, AND AN ABSOLUTE DELIGHT TO KNOW"

British General San Cowan

were mutually supportive, meaning that a force needed to hold both, or neither. The positions were in the hands of the Gurkhas on 25 June, but a determined Japanese assault was contesting their ownership. During the resistance, Subedar (warrant officer) Netrabahadur Thapa was killed in action on the morning of 26 June and posthumously awarded a VC. Later that day, 24-year-old Rai's company was ordered to retake the two positions.

Dense jungle pressed up against Mortar Hill and Water Piquet on one side, but this was too difficult for a sizeable body of men to move through. Therefore, the approach would need to be made over open ground. A false crest about 245ft (75m) from the summit of Mortar Hill was an especially deadly feature of the land. Anyone attacking the hill would need to climb over this false crest and cover the final distance while totally exposed to enemy fire. This included a 1.5in (37mm) gun, sited in the jungle, which had played havoc with the Gurkha force defending the position just hours earlier.

An artillery bombardment was laid down to provide cover for the advancing men, but by the time they had made their way up the slippery slopes on Mortar Hill and reached the false crest, they were too close to the enemy position for the supporting fire to continue. Rai's company quickly became pinned down, both by the 1.5in (37mm) gun in the jungle and a machine gun nest at the top of the hill.

Rai's actions at this point were extraordinary. Although he appeared to think of them as nothing more than pragmatic responses to the situation at hand, they displayed breath-taking bravery and a total lack of concern for his own life. The first problem was the machine gun nest. It would inevitably cut his company to pieces and the longer it was allowed to fire upon them, the more casualties it would inflict. Rai's solution? Charge it. Firing as he went, he led his section over the exposed ground to the Japanese position and the nest was wiped out. With this obstacle cleared, the rest of the company were able to take control of the entire hill, driving the Japanese off and forcing them to fall back on Water Piquet, around 590ft (180m) away.

Rai took on the next problem without hesitation. The men were now under fire from the 1.5in (37mm) gun and the Japanese troops on Water Piquet. Rai's solution? He led his section in a charge against it. When his Thompson sub-machine gun jammed, he grabbed his section's Bren gun and used that



Rai (left) arrives in London in 1972, a year after his retirement from the Indian Army



Rai (right, with fellow VC winners Ganju Lama and Gaje Ghale) arrives for the 1956 Victoria Cross Centenary celebrations in London



Rai's Victoria Cross when offered up for sale at auction in 2004

instead. The entire five-man gun crew was wiped out, but only three of the men in Rai's section had emerged unscathed from the two charges, and the Japanese on Water Piquet still had to be dealt with.

Rai and the survivors of his foray into the jungle regrouped with the rest of C company on Mortar Hill and prepared to attack this second enemy position. While approaching Water Piquet, however, the men came under fire from a hidden Japanese bunker on their flank and once more started to take casualties. Bursts of machine gun fire and numerous grenades had the men pinned down when Rai made another quick decision. Ordering a Bren carrier to give covering fire, he advanced alone, along a shallow trench, to the bunker. He attacked with a hand grenade and his Thompson sub-machine gun, clearing the bunker and allowing the advance on the hill to resume.

Clearly having seen enough of the ferocious Gurkhas, the Japanese on top of Water Piquet quietly withdrew, leaving C company in command of both hills.

The London Gazette of 5 October 1944 carried a detailed account of Rai's heroic actions in winning the Victoria Cross, referring to his "indomitable courage". In fact, such was the level of bravery displayed by Rai, there appears to have been some doubt over the outcome of his actions. Perhaps thinking it impossible that a man could have survived three such acts of conspicuous bravery, his Victoria Cross was first announced as a posthumous award.

"NAIK AGANSING RAI'S MAGNIFICENT DISPLAY OF INITIATIVE, OUTSTANDING BRAVERY AND GALLANT LEADERSHIP, SO INSPIRED THE REST OF THE COMPANY THAT, IN SPITE OF HEAVY CASUALTIES, THE RESULT OF THIS IMPORTANT ACTION WAS NEVER IN DOUBT"

***The London Gazette*, 5 October 1944**

Proving these reports wrong, Rai received his medal from Field Marshal Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, in Peshawar, on 23 January 1945. On the same day, the widow of Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa received her late husband's Victoria Cross – the two medals won on the same day, by men from the same regiment.

Rai later served as an instructor for the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles and was part of the army of occupation in Japan. He remained with the Indian Army after independence in 1947, serving as a subedar major (an officer rank junior to a lieutenant) as part of the United Nations' force in the Congo in 1962-63.

He retired in 1971 and returned to the village of his birth, Amsara, where he was known for his quiet manner and good humour. He could have lived in luxury had he chosen to sell his medals, but instead preferred a quiet life in his home village. When asked about his heroic actions, he would modestly reply "I forget," but on one occasion, when talking with retired British General Sam Cowan, he revealed a little more.

"I decided that I was a dead man," he said. "There was no way I was going to come out alive so I decided just to kill as many of the enemy as I could before they killed me. No, I wasn't afraid: dead men know no fear."

Five thousand people attended his funeral in 2000, and four years after his death, his Victoria Cross became the first ever Gurkha VC to be sold at auction. The decision to sell the medal, made by his two sons and three daughters, was not for personal gain – it raised £115,000 for a Nepalese children's charity.

Images: Alamy, Getty



ERNEST ‘SMOKEY’ SMITH

In October 1944, as the Allies fought to establish a bridgehead across Italy’s Savio River, a roguish private challenged an armoured column

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The Mark V Panther was close, but not close enough for Ernest ‘Smokey’ Smith to fire his PIAT (Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank) into the beast’s hull. Pressed up against the side of the ditch beside his wounded comrade, ignoring the command car already out of action and two self-propelled guns (SPGs) being engaged elsewhere, he fumbled with the cumbersome 15kg weapon and waited for the right moment. The tank lurching towards him continued to spit rounds into the rain-sodden earth as it had when it struck the now-groaning Private James Tennant. But Smokey, a notoriously insubordinate soldier from the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada – having been promoted and demoted nine times – remained undeterred by the Germans’ 26th Panzer Division column in front of him. Finally, with the Panther about nine metres away, he stood in full view of the advancing enemy, aimed his shoulder-braced launcher and took his shot.

It was the night of 21-22 October 1944, and the Canadians, making up part of the British Eighth Army, were attempting to establish a bridgehead across the Savio River in northern Italy’s Romagna region. Their plan thereafter was to continue their right hook around Cesena, a city haemorrhaging German troops who, not wishing to risk encirclement, were withdrawing toward Ravenna. However, a mere five hours earlier, torrential rain had caused the river to swell almost two metres, all but preventing Allied armour from crossing the muddy, slippery high banks. The Seaforths on the right flank were alone when it came to fending off enemy tanks, although they did have the newly formed tank-hunting platoon that included one officer, one sergeant, one corporal and 14 other ranks – Smokey among them. Four two-man crews had been tasked with operating the PIATS, long loathed by the Canadians, while six carried Thompson sub-machine guns and No.75 grenades to offer protection.

Despite his reputation for getting into trouble, Smokey had gained enough combat experience to know what to do. Born in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1914, he had enlisted in the Canadian Army in March 1940. “I figured the war would be over in three months and I’d see Europe without paying for it,” the former contractor remarked after the conflict’s conclusion. “Six years later, I was still seeing Europe.” His first taste of action came in July 1943 when the First Canadian Infantry Division landed alongside British and American forces



***Above:** When Smokey visited Dieppe, France, for the 60th anniversary of Operation Jubilee in 2002, he was the last surviving holder of the Canadian Victoria Cross*

Images © Alamy, Wiki / PD / Gov

“HIS COMRADES WERE SO INSPIRED THAT THE BRIDGEHEAD WAS HELD FIRM AGAINST ALL ENEMY ATTACKS”

VC Citation



for the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky). There, he sustained shrapnel injuries during fighting near Mount Etna, whereby he was evacuated to recover. Smokey – so nicknamed because he used to 'smoke' his school friends at sprinting races as a child – re-joined his unit for what would become one of Canada's greatest tests: The Battle of Ortona.

Liberating the Italian port town on the Adriatic coast would prove to be such a bloody affair that it was dubbed 'Little Stalingrad' due to the fierce house-to-house, hand-to-hand combat over eight days in December 1943. In one instance amid the relentless urban warfare, Smokey had prevented a fellow soldier from picking up a German knife propped up in a jar of wheat grains. He then showcased his reasoning by striking the would-be souvenir into the street where the booby trap exploded.

Smokey understood the enemy back in Ortona. He had understood them during his missions for potential German prisoners in the cruel winter stalemate of late 1943 and early 1944. The 30-year-old hell-raising private understood them still when his PIAT released its 1.1kg hollow-charged projectile at the Panther opposing him just off the Cesena-Ravenna road.

The shell struck true, stopping the tank in its tracks. Yet unfortunately for Smokey it failed to prevent the ten German infantry riding on the armour's back from dismounting and facing him with their MP-40s and stick grenades. Isolated from the rest of his platoon that had been caught up in the skirmish a short distance away, and with Tennant in no state to help, Smokey grabbed his Thompson and opened fire at point-blank range.

The spray of bullets downed four enemies, leaving the remaining six to flee. But there would be no respite, for it was then that a second Panther, out of PIAT range and accompanied by numerous grenadiers, took notice of Smokey. The tank's main gun lurched into action as scores of infantry charged forward. But instead of making a hasty retreat to safety, Smokey reloaded his sub-machine gun and tore into his assailants. "They must have figured there was a whole army there because they could have wiped me out in no time if they'd known I was practically all by myself," he said. By the end of the struggle it was the Germans, not Smokey, on the backfoot as they retreated in disorder. All that was left was to single-handedly drag Tennant out of harm's way while under intense fire, at which point Smokey managed to summon medical assistance. Once he knew Tennant was in caring hands and would survive, Smokey returned to the battle in preparation for a counterattack that never materialised.

By the end of the night the armoured column had been decimated. Among the burning shells was the Panther confronted by Smokey, both SPGs, and other vehicles that had tried to escape but had either been challenged by the tank-hunting platoon or bogged down in the mud and water. Cesena was to be secured by the British Eighth Army, enabling further advances north towards the Ronco River and beyond. The 26th Panzer Division that had put up such stout resistance, however, would live to be a thorn in the Canadians' side.

In the meantime, countless Seaforth Highlanders deserved recognition for their efforts, not least the exploits of Smokey. His citation for the Victoria Cross – the third awarded to a Canadian in Italy after Paul Triquet and John Mahony, as well as being the only one given to a Canadian private in WWII – praised him for his "dogged determination, outstanding devotion to duty and superb gallantry", recognising that "his comrades were so inspired that the bridgehead was held firm against all enemy attacks".

Prior to receiving the medal from King George VI at Buckingham Palace, Smokey was placed in a jail cell to prevent him from getting into any mischief. He recalled: "When I was first locked up I was thinking: 'What the hell?' But then

"TO GENERATIONS OF CANADIANS, SMOKEY SMITH STOOD FOR COURAGE AND RESOLVE AT A TIME OF GREAT NEED, AN EXAMPLE OF STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, LOYALTY AND DUTY"

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin



Six Canadian VC recipients from left to right: Frederick George Topham, Ernest 'Smokey' Smith, Frederick Albert Tilston, Paul Triquet, David Currie and John Mahony



Ernest 'Smokey' Smith married in 1947, had two children, and re-joined the forces in the 1950s. He later opened a travel agency with his wife



they gave me a couple of beers and I was very happy.” More pints would be bought for him in the London pub he subsequently visited, where all the VC recipient had to do was flaunt his red ribbon at the bar.

A hero’s welcome greeted Smokey back in New Westminster. Settling down to enjoy a few years of respite from the military, he re-joined in the 1950s to fight in the Korean War. Unknown to him at the time, his iconic status would prevent him from being thrust back into active service. He stayed with the army all the same, retiring in 1964 a sergeant – at last able to retain an NCO rank. In the following years Smokey started a travel agency with his wife, Esther, whom he’d married in 1947, and



Thousands of people crowded the streets of Ottawa for Smokey’s funeral procession in 2005. His ashes were scattered in the Strait of Georgia, British Columbia

together they operated the Vancouver-based business for several decades alongside raising their two children. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada in 1995. With the passing of Dieppe Raid veteran Cecil Merritt in 2000, Smokey became the last surviving holder of the Canadian Victoria Cross. He passed away peacefully on 3 August 2005, aged 91.

Thousands of tributes poured in from across the country and the world for the great – if somewhat reprobate – man. His coffin was transported by a funeral procession surrounded by huge crowds, and lay in state at Canada’s Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Among the attendees at the House of Commons was then-Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin, who said: “To generations of Canadians, Smokey Smith stood for courage and resolve at a time of great need, an example of strength of character, loyalty and duty… [He] remained… a loyal comrade-in-arms to all his fellow veterans. His passing marks a milestone in Canadian history… We are a better nation because of men like Sgt Smokey Smith. He was – and will always be – a much-respected and remarkable Canadian hero.”

Infantrymen of the 48th Highlanders of Canada prepare to attack on the Italian front near San Leonardo di Ortona, 10 December 1943

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JAMES ALLEN WARD

In July 1941, 13,000ft above the Dutch coastline in a severely damaged Wellington bomber, this New Zealand airman clambered onto his aircraft's wing to put out a fire and save his comrades

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The German night fighter seemed to come from nowhere. One minute, the crew of the No.75 Squadron's Wellington IC, L7818, AA-R had been returning home to RAF Feltwell, Norfolk, after a raid on Münster, a mission relatively free from opposition with its end almost in sight. The next, cannon shells smashed through their aircraft, spraying fragments everywhere and filling the cockpit with smoke as a Messerschmitt Bf 110 fired at them from beneath.

The damage wrought was swift and severe: the bomber's hydraulic lines were rendered useless, its communication systems knocked out and its undercarriage was in a perilous state. Meanwhile, in the rear turret, Sergeant AJR Box was struck in the foot, though he did manage to fire a few rounds at the attacker, potentially a killing blow that at least ensured they would not see the night fighter again. This mattered little because the Wellington's starboard engine had also been hit and a fuel tank opened, prompting a fire on the wing that, as the flames spread, would surely send the bomber hurtling to the ground in an inferno.

Second pilot James Allen Ward, like his comrades, saw little hope in the situation. A 22-year-old New Zealander, athletic and a proud Kiwi, he watched as Canadian pilot Squadron Leader RP Widdowson turned the aircraft parallel with the Dutch coast. The question was whether they should attempt to crash-land at sea or brave the crossing for Blighty. It appeared unlikely that the plane, in its current condition, could make it much further, so Widdowson commanded Ward to get everyone kitted out in their parachutes. Before Ward left the cockpit to pass on the message, however, he was given one more order by Widdowson: see if he could "put that bloody fire out". A daunting task if ever there was one. Ward first instructed the crew to prepare for the worst and then, with the help of English radio operator Sergeant W Mason and fellow New Zealander and navigator Sergeant LA Lawton, got to work controlling the blaze. The three initially ripped a hole in the khaki-coloured fabric on the side of the fuselage and aimed their extinguishers at the blaze – only for the fierce slipstream outside to blow the liquid away. Desperate, they resorted to flinging coffee from their thermos at the flames, but that too proved futile.


© Getty

Widdowson again steered the aircraft towards England, in little doubt that the Wellington would be forced down well short of safety but deeming a cold night in a dinghy preferable to a German POW camp. He wasn't alone in that sentiment as the crew checked over their parachutes and steadied their nerves for what lay ahead. Except Ward had another idea. Having noticed the canvas cockpit cover bundled up in a corner, the young Kiwi picked it up and said to Lawton with a boyish grin: "Think I will hop out with this." He wasn't joking, as hair-brained and foolhardy as his plan sounded to the rest of the crew. Nor was he joking when he argued against taking his parachute because it would only get in the way and increase the drag from the slipstream. But he was ultimately overruled on venturing outside without the only means of surviving should he fall. What's more, a rope, retrieved from the dinghy, was tied around him with the

***Left:** A Canadian Air Force crew pictured in front of their Wellington bomber, January 1942*

"YOU MUST FEEL VERY HUMBLE AND AWKWARD IN MY PRESENCE... THEN YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW HUMBLE AND AWKWARD I FEEL IN YOURS"

Winston Churchill to James Ward

A smiling Sergeant James Allen Ward, VC, standing in the cockpit of a No.75 Squadron Wellington bomber

Image: Auckland Museum, Public Domain

other end attached to Lawton. All that was left was for Ward to clamber out of the stricken bomber's astrodome and into the unknown. He was ready.

Ward had grown up in Whanganui, North Island, with a passion for model aircraft, and before the war he'd enjoyed a brief stint as a teacher at the local school. But the young New Zealander now found himself in the peculiar position of scrambling from the upper hatch of a real aircraft travelling at nearly 150kph.

The gale-force winds lashed at him as he leveraged himself onto the wing below. His next challenge was to carefully manoeuvre himself closer to the fire without losing his grip, which he did by kicking holes into the side of the Wellington to keep his boots secure. Still anchored to Lawton, who looked on in dismay, Ward also punched at the framework to create handholds, all the while edging closer to the blaze.

He lay as flat as he could, yet his chest parachute and the bulk of the canvas he was clinging to were hindering his movement. At one time, such was the slipstream's unrelenting force against his body, he was pushed back onto the fuselage. But he had no choice – he had to make another attempt. Inch by inch, battling extreme coldness and fatigue, Ward reached the large flaming gash the German night fighter had inflicted upon the Wellington and began to plug the hole with the canvas. It blew away almost instantly, but Ward managed to grab it and cram it back into the engine fire. It blew away again, lost forever.

Thankfully, at the very least the fire was less severe due to Ward's efforts. Despite being unable to completely extinguish the inferno, he had made enough of a difference to give the crew a sporting chance of making it across the North Sea to Britain. But first he needed to get back to the astrodome.

With a fretful Lawton keeping the rope taut and Ward once more utilising his foot and handholds, he returned to the fuselage, hauled himself to the hatch and jimmied his way in. A brief panic overcame him when his right leg got wedged in the opening, but Lawton freed him as Ward collapsed into the fuselage. The cabin felt almost blissfully quiet compared to the hell he had subjected himself to moments before. Lawton went to the cockpit to update Widdowson, who carried on course for home.

> **"THE FLIGHT HOME HAD BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BY THE GALLANTRY OF SERGEANT WARD IN EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE ON THE WING IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY"**
>
> **James Ward's VC citation**

Despite Ward's incredible bravery, they weren't out of danger yet: the crew's next task was to the safely land the stricken aircraft at RAF Newmarket, Suffolk, by manually cranking down the badly damaged landing gear.

With the gear deployed, and thanks to their Canadian pilot's exemplary flying skill, the Wellington touched down successfully – albeit after careening down the entire length of the runway and crashing through a barbed-wire perimeter fence. L7818 was written off, never to fly again, but its crew, including its brave Kiwi second pilot, survived.

The awarding of Ward's Victoria Cross was announced on 5 August, 1941. His citation reads: "While flying over the Zuider Zee… [Ward's] aircraft was attacked from beneath by a German Bf 110… The flight home had been made possible by the gallantry of Sergeant Ward in extinguishing the fire on the wing in circumstances of the greatest difficulty and at the risk of his life." According to an anecdotal testimony, Ward was later summoned to 10 Downing Street to meet the prime minister. The encounter proved to be overwhelming for the young New Zealander, as noted by Winston Churchill, who, apparently sensing Ward's discomfort, said to him: "You must feel very humble and awkward in my presence." Ward reportedly agreed, at which point the prime minister continued: "Then you can imagine how humble and awkward I feel in yours." Speaking to the crowd at the event, Ward attributed his success to the work of his ground crew, stating: "There are no VCs for them, but if they didn't do a first-class job for us… we wouldn't get back."

Sadly, it wouldn't be long until Ward didn't return. On 15 September, 1941, having been given command of his own crew and aircraft, James Allen Ward, VC, encountered fierce enemy resistance during an air raid on Hamburg and his plane was severely damaged.

Perhaps knowing that no daring endeavours could save him this time, he instead held his fatally damaged Wellington IC, X3205 steady enough for Sergeants LE Peterson and HC Watson to escape. Ward, along with Sergeants HG Sloman, RW Toller and KH Toothill, perished in the flames that engulfed the bomber. They were buried in Ohlsdorf Cemetery, Germany, following official identification.

Ward's VC medal was presented to his family in 1942, somewhat aptly in New Zealand's capital city of Wellington. The award was then loaned to the Royal New Zealand Air Force before going on permanent display at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Other recognitions of Ward's heroism exist, not least several painted depictions of his extraordinary 'wing walk' that night. A plaque honouring him also stands in Queens Gardens in Dunedin, New Zealand, while the Wellington Faculty of Education renamed one of its halls after the young pilot. Additionally, in the English village of Feltwell, Norfolk, where the Victoria Cross recipient's unit was based, the local pub called The Wellington has a mural dedicated to No.75 Squadron. In this way, James Allen Ward's heroic legacy is remembered on both sides of the world.

Crews of No.149 Squadron approach a line of Wellington bombers at Mildenhall, Suffolk, for an early morning training sortie

© Getty







Above: *Airmen and maintenance crew inspect the heavy damage inflicted upon a Wellington bomber during a mission*

Above, left: *James Allen Ward photographed in uniform*

Left: *A German Messerschmitt Bf 110 (or Me 110) in flight. Thousands of Allied bomber airmen lost their lives to these deadly fighters*



JAMES BRINDLEY NICOLSON

Only one Victoria Cross was awarded to RAF Fighter Command during World War II. It went to this brave Hurricane flight lieutenant for extraordinary heroism during the Battle of Britain

WORDS **ANDY SAUNDERS**

In December 1940, the BBC broadcast an anonymous RAF fighter pilot talking about his experiences during the Battle of Britain earlier that year. That unnamed pilot was Flight Lieutenant James Brindley Nicolson, who had flown Hurricanes with 249 Squadron from RAF Boscombe Down. In fact, by the time of the broadcast, an announcement had been made in the *London Gazette* on 15 November promulgating the award of a Victoria Cross to Nicolson. But for those listening to James Nicolson telling his story, there was absolutely no connection to the recent public announcement of his VC.

By the middle of August 1940, the Battle of Britain was in full swing and many of the RAF's fighter squadrons had already seen action. 249 Squadron, though, had been in the relative backwater of RAF Leconfield, Lincolnshire. Then, the unit was posted south to Boscombe Down on 14 August. Two days later, over Southampton, the squadron had its first real taste of battle.

In the space of a few minutes two Hurricanes were shot down, with Pilot Officer Martyn King killed, Flight Lieutenant James Nicolson severely wounded and another Hurricane damaged. On the 'credit' side, Nicolson claimed one Me 110 'probably destroyed', albeit 'inconclusive'.

What happened in that encounter, though, has subsequently been subject to confusion and varying degrees of contradiction. However, let us look at the transcript of James Nicolson's BBC broadcast: "That was a glorious day. The Sun was shining from a cloudless sky, with hardly a breath of wind anywhere. My squadron was going towards Southampton on patrol at 15,000 feet [4,570 metres] when I saw three Ju 88 bombers about four miles [6.4 kilometres] away, flying across our bows.



Pilot Officer Tom 'Ginger' Neil of 249 Squadron with Hurricane GN – A, the aircraft flown by James Nicolson when he earned his Victoria Cross

"I reported this to our squadron leader and he replied, 'Go after them with your section'. I led my section of aircraft round and towards the bombers. We chased hard after them, but when we were about a mile [1.6 kilometres] behind we saw the 88s fly straight into a squadron of Spitfires. I used to fly a Spitfire myself and guessed it was curtains for the three Junkers. I was right. They were all shot down in quick time with no pickings for us. I must confess I was very disappointed, for I had never fired at a Hun in my life and was dying to have a crack at them.

"So, we swung round again and started to climb up to 18,000 feet [5,485 metres] over Southampton to re-join our squadron when suddenly, very close, in rapid succession, I heard four big bangs. They were the loudest noises I'd ever heard, and they had been made by four cannon shells from a Messerschmitt 110 hitting my machine.

"The first shell tore through the hood over my cockpit and sent splinters into my left eye. One splinter nearly severed my eyelid. I couldn't see through that eye for blood. The second cannon shell struck my spare petrol tank and set it on fire. The third crashed into the cockpit and tore off my right trouser leg. The fourth shell struck the back of my left shoe, shattering the heel

"...FLIGHT LIEUTENANT NICOLSON'S AIRCRAFT WAS HIT BY FOUR CANNON SHELLS, TWO OF WHICH WOUNDED HIM... WHEN ABOUT TO ABANDON HIS AIRCRAFT OWING TO FLAMES IN THE COCKPIT HE SIGHTED AN ENEMY FIGHTER. THIS HE ATTACKED AND SHOT DOWN..."

– Victoria Cross citation, *London Gazette*, 15 November 1940

James Nicolson pictured at the RAF convalescent hospital after receiving news of the award of the Victoria Cross

of the shoe and making a mess of my left foot, but I didn't know anything about that until later. Anyway, the effect of these four shells was to make me dive away to the right. Then I started cursing myself for my carelessness. 'What a fool I'd been', I thought. 'What a fool'.

"I was thinking about jumping when suddenly a Messerschmitt 110 whizzed underneath and got right in my gun sight. Fortunately, no damage had been done to my windscreen or sights, and when I was chasing the Junkers I'd switched everything on, so everything was set for a fight. I pressed the gun button, for the Messerschmitt was in nice range.

"He was going like mad, twisting and turning as he tried to get away from my fire, so I pushed the throttle wide open. Both of us went down in a dive. First, he turned left then right, then left and right again. He did three turns to the right and finally a fourth turn to the left. I remember shouting out loud at him, 'I'll teach you some manners you Hun'. I shouted other things as well. I knew I was getting him nearly all the time I was firing.

"By this time, it was pretty hot from the burst petrol tank. I couldn't see much flame, but reckoned it was there alright. I remember looking at my left hand, which was keeping the throttle open, and seemed to be in the fire itself. I could see the skin peeling off yet had little pain. Unconsciously, too, I'd drawn my feet up under my parachute on the seat – to escape the heat, I suppose.

"Well, I gave the Hun all I had and the last I saw, he was going down with his right wing lower than the left. I gave him a parting burst, and, as he disappeared, started thinking about saving myself."

From this dramatic account of a desperate action, with the pilot overwhelmed by 'red mist' and exacting retribution on his erstwhile attacker, there is little wonder he was recommended for a VC. However, Nicolson left another testimony; his personal combat report. In it, having described the combat, he goes on: "I then abandoned aircraft with difficulty and after dropping some 5,000ft [1,525 metres] pulled cord – I was shot in buttocks by an LDV (local defence volunteer) just before landing".

Censored for public consumption, this wasn't mentioned in the BBC broadcast. However, the combat report, dictated to his CO, Squadron Leader John Grandy while Nicolson was in hospital, also added, "I cannot swear whether firing button was at 'safe' or 'fire'". This is at odds with definitive statements made in his broadcast.

That aside, there is no doubt that Nicolson stayed with his burning fighter trying to turn the tables on his attacker. And there is no doubting he was fired on from the ground in his parachute. A local Southampton man, Robert Stanley, took up the story: "In 1940 I served in the LDV. On 16 August I saw a Hurricane descending with a trail of smoke. The pilot baled-out and I decided to follow him to be on hand if help was required.

"I set off in hot pursuit of the airman, now drifting westwards. Keeping him in sight I was horrified to see tracer bullets winging towards him from the ground. Arriving where he landed, I helped release him from his parachute. At this point a group of Royal Engineers came yelling



Nicolson plays Shove Halfpenny while recuperating in hospital, 1940

"I GAVE THE HUN ALL I HAD AND THE LAST I SAW, HE WAS GOING DOWN WITH HIS RIGHT WING LOWER THAN THE LEFT. I GAVE HIM A PARTING BURST, AND AS HE DISAPPEARED STARTED THINKING ABOUT SAVING MYSELF"



Nicolson was the only Fighter Command pilot to receive the VC, and was also later awarded the DFC

into the field – clearly intent on harm. I ran towards them shouting, 'No! He's one of ours!', and with a Policeman managed to calm things. Clearly, they'd been responsible for the shooting as the gunfire came from their nearby HQ.

"Later, I found 11 recently fired .303 cases in a field near their base. The LDV got the blame for it, but I know it was the REs – because we in the LDV had .300 rifles, not .303."

Nicolson, peppered in the buttocks, had heard the shooting and concluded those wounds to be shotgun pellets. In fact, they were probably splinters from cannon shells that exploded around him – borne out by examination of his tunic, trousers and Mae West at Tangmere Military Aviation Museum. Luckily, the soldiers were poor shots, otherwise the outcome might have been different.

Another pilot on the squadron, Pilot Officer 'Ginger' Neil, related, "It appeared he had shot at the Hun who had set him on fire. Stout fellow. The account which John Grandy received was very factual and not at all in the manner of 'Nick', who could be quite imaginative at times. We were all especially amused when we learned than an LDV had shot him in the backside before he landed in his parachute. In the bum, for heaven's sake! Everything happened to 'Nick'."

As for the Me 110 'probably destroyed' by Nicolson, there is also confusion. His attacker was reportedly the same Me 110, but there were no Me 110s in combat in that area; no Me 110s are shown in Luftwaffe records as lost or damaged, and no Me 110 pilot made any claims. There was, however, a Me 109 pilot who made victory claims over two Hurricanes in the right place and time; Oberleutnant Heinz Bretnütz of 6./JG 53, who claimed his 13th and 14th victories – clearly, Nicolson and King.

"FLIGHT LIEUTENANT NICOLSON HAS ALWAYS DISPLAYED GREAT ENTHUSIASM FOR AIR FIGHTING AND THIS INCIDENT SHOWS THAT HE POSSESSES COURAGE AND DETERMINATION OF A HIGH ORDER. BY CONTINUING TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY AFTER HE HAD BEEN WOUNDED AND HIS AIRCRAFT SET ON FIRE, HE DISPLAYED EXCEPTIONAL GALLANTRY AND DISREGARD FOR THE SAFETY OF HIS OWN LIFE"

– Victoria Cross citation 15 November 1940

The involvement of 249 Squadron with Me 109s is confirmed in a report by Squadron Leader John Grandy, dated 19 August 1940, stating Nicolson was involved with an "unknown number of Me 109s". Nevertheless, confusion by Nicolson and official reports has led to the accepted version involving Me 110s. One thing, however, is certain; James Brindley Nicolson acquitted himself bravely and endured terrible injury in efforts to down the enemy.

Fully recovered by September 1941, Nicolson was posted to India in 1942. Between August 1943 and August 1944, as squadron leader and CO of 27 Squadron, he flew Beaufighters over Burma, earning the DFC.

As a wing commander, Nicolson was killed on 2 May 1945 when the 355 Squadron B-24 Liberator in which he was flying as supernumerary caught fire and crashed in the Bay of Bengal. No trace of him was ever found.

His VC medal group was sold at auction by his widow in 1983 for £110,000 – then a record for a VC – and was purchased by the RAF Museum, Hendon.



Hawker Hurricanes, pictured over France in 1940. Hurricanes were heavily involved during the Battle of Britain

Images: Alamy, Getty



TUL BAHADUR PUN

In June 1944, as Allied forces began re-establishing dominance in Burma, a Gurkha Chindit stormed Japanese positions on a railway bridge to save his comrades, earning him the British Empire's highest military honour

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The men of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles, watched in dismay as Acting Captain Michael Allmand, a respected company commander who had proven his courage in previous engagements, crawled ahead of his unit towards the Japanese machine gun nest. Wading through mud and shell holes, he seemed unstoppable – until a burst of fire struck him down, a wound that would ultimately prove fatal.

The enemy bullets continued to tear into the dwindling Chindit forces from across the rail bridge in the Burmese town of Mogaung. A war hero had fallen and, unknown to those who had witnessed it, a posthumous Victoria Cross recipient had risen. But Michael Allmand VC wouldn't be the only recipient of Britain's highest military honour that day – 23 June 1944 – Gurkha rifleman Tul Bahadur Pun was about to showcase his bravery and fighting prowess too.

Like so many from the hill villages of Western Nepal, Tul Bahadur Pun enlisted to serve a king and country almost 8,000km away. His training took place at Abbottabad in Northern India (present-day Pakistan), whereby he became part of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Gurkha Rifles in the 77th Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier Mike Calvert. These servicemen would experience the horrors of the South-East Asian Theatre in the years to come. What had begun with a series of swift and brutal actions carried out by the Japanese, perhaps most infamously the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Hong Kong, was followed by an invasion of Burma in December 1941. The enemy advanced from Axis-occupied Thailand, captured Rangoon, cut off the Burma Road – depriving the Nationalist Chinese armies of essential supplies – and pushed some 1,600km further to place themselves at the gates of British India.

By May 1942, not only had the British lost their Burmese stronghold to a blitzkrieg but they had also effectively surrendered the country's rich resources and, worse still, the Japanese were well-positioned to help incite an Indian insurrection against the British Raj – at least in the minds of British high command. Something needed to be done, and soon, yet the ensuing months saw little more than a stalemate as both sides attempted to probe each other's strengths and weaknesses across the border. The first counter-attack against the Japanese was in the southwestern Burmese region of Arakan, ending in a humiliating failure with terrible losses.


© Getty

Morale sank to an all-time low. However, in 1943 good news arrived that the first Chindit expedition, called Operation Longcloth, involving men of the 77th Infantry Brigade, had been largely successful in its recent use of guerrilla tactics. This now tried-and-tested method of disrupting enemy supply lines and harassing enemy soldiers proved that the Allied troops could take the fight deep into the jungle.

The Chindits' greatest test would come the next year when the Allies' luck was on the cusp of changing for the better. The infamous Battles of Kohima and Imphal loomed as the Japanese advance on India, dubbed Operation U-Go, gathered momentum. But the Allies had a plan of their own: in February 1944 the 77th Infantry Brigade and the rest of the second Chindit expedition, under the unconventional Major-General Orde Wingate, successfully infiltrated the Japanese lines during Operation Thursday. Their task was to put pressure on the enemy at

***Left:** Major-General Orde Wingate's Chindits travelling through the jungle with their mules*

"AMONG THE COMRADES SAVED WAS MAJOR JAMES RUTHERFORD LUMLEY, WHOSE NOT-YET-BORN DAUGHTER WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON PUN'S LATER LIFE"

Tul Bahadur Pun pictured at the Royal Military School of Music in Twickenham, London, 21 September 2007

the same time as advancing towards the town of Mogaung. But appalling weather conditions, the declining health of soldiers riddled with disease and fierce fighting over several weeks hampered efforts considerably. At the end of May 1944 the 77th Infantry Brigade, the 3/6GR among its ranks, was ordered to capture the town itself, which was thought to be held by around 4,000 Japanese personnel.

The coming days saw the Allied ranks swell with Chinese forces, who would provide crucial artillery support. There were also the initial heroic feats of Allmand who, with the help of his men, seized the vital Pin Hmi road bridge and a nearby ridge, acts that would feature in his Victoria Cross citation. Nevertheless, the main obstacle of a heavily defended railway bridge remained. On 23 June, 1944, the battalion received orders to knock out its emplacements, notably the machine gun nest based in a brick building dubbed, somewhat ominously, the "Red House". It was here that the 20-year-old Allmand suffered his fatal wound. It was here too that the almost-as-young Tul Bahadur Pun took it upon himself to silence the enemy resistance once and for all.

With the 6th Gurkha Rifle's "B" Company pinned down and Pun's section all but wiped out, the Nepali Chindit reached for the only Bren light machine gun and stood. The Red

"PUN THEN SEIZED THE BREN GUN... FIRING FROM THE HIP AS HE WENT"

VC Citation

House was in his sights as he charged forward, firing from the hip, across the 30 metres of muddy, cratered and debris-strewn open ground. The rising sun behind him silhouetted his figure, making him a perfect target for those firing at him, but he escaped unscathed. He soon made it to the Red House and, to the Japanese defenders' disbelief, he entered the building with his weapon at the ready. At least three Japanese soldiers were killed in the close combat that followed and a further five were reportedly put to flight. Pun glanced at the two light machine guns and vast quantities of ammunition he had just claimed. His unit, he could see, was still trapped. Not considering the potential dangers to his own life, alone on the Japanese lines, Pun proceeded to lay down supporting fire from his position to free the rest of his men. Among the comrades saved was Major James Rutherford Lumley, whose not-yet-born daughter, Joanna, would have a significant influence on his later life.

But all that mattered in the moment was that due in large part to Pun's daring initiative the Chindits had achieved their objective, albeit at the cost of heavy casualties. Pun's actions that day undoubtedly deserved recognition, and his citation reads: "[Tul Bahadur Pun's] outstanding courage and superb gallantry in the face of odds… were most inspiring to all ranks and were beyond praise." Mogaung fell to the Allies on 27 June, several months after Pun received his Victoria Cross at a special parade held in Delhi. At the end of the Second World War, he continued with the 6th Gurkha Rifles, serving in Malaya and Hong Kong before retiring with the honorary rank of Lieutenant (QGO) on 14 May, 1959. The VC recipient subsequently returned to his Nepali village although, regrettably, his fighting days were not yet over.

Pun re-entered the public eye in the mid-2000s when his application to settle in Britain was refused because, according to the British authorities, the veteran failed to establish strong ties to the UK. The news was met with widespread outrage and protests, particularly after reports that Pun, at approximately 84 years old (Nepalese birth records from the time



British and Gurkha soldiers marching through Burma in March 1945, days after Pun received his Victoria Cross in India

are often unreliable), was having to travel long distances, largely on foot or carried by Sherpas, to receive much-needed medical treatment and his monthly British Army pension. One of those who later fronted a campaign to ensure Gurkha rights in Britain was none other than actress Dame Joanna Lumley, whose father, Major Lumley, had been saved by Pun's bravery all those years before. The campaign greatly increased public awareness of Pun's situation – and that of many other Gurkha veterans – and the decision to deny his application was eventually overturned. In 2007, he arrived in London to a hero's welcome.

His success story was the start of a long and arduous fight to ensure that thousands of other Gurkha veterans, all of whom had retired prior to 1997 and had been denied UK residency, were able to reapply for British visas. His family, meanwhile, continued a fight of their own. In September 2010, in the thick of the Afghanistan War, Pun's grandson, Acting Sergeant Dipprasad Pun, was serving with the Royal Gurkha Rifles in Helmand Province when his isolated outpost came under attack by Taliban insurgents. One of only four men left in the compound while his platoon was on patrol, the 31-year-old single-handedly fended off the enemy, killing at least three assailants and forcing the others to flee. His outstanding performance of duty, like that of his grandfather decades previously, saved the lives of his three comrades and prevented the position from being overrun. He received the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross as a result.

Tul Bahadur Pun, VC, passed away on 20 April, 2011, while on a visit to his village of Myagdi in Nepal. There are several memorials that honour him and, on June 23, 2021 (exactly 77 years after his actions at Mogaung) a Great Western Railway train was named after him. Dr Daren Bowyer, Director of The Gurkha Museum in Winchester, says of Pun's legacy: "The story of Tul Bahadur Pun, VC, is as inspiring as it is typical as an example of Gurkha resilience, heroism and self-sacrifice in Britain's service. His is one of 13 Victoria Crosses won by Gurkha soldiers and officers; a further 13 have been won by British officers serving in Gurkha units. Tul Bahadur's VC is displayed at the Gurkha Museum, appropriately alongside that of Captain Michael Allmand, VC."





All images © Alamy

***Above, left:** Dame Joanna Lumley with Tul Bahadur Pun, VC (left) and Lachhiman Gurung, VC (right)*

***Above, right:** Sergeant Dipprasad Pun, CGC – grandson of Tul Bahadur Pun, VC – receives his Conspicuous Gallantry Cross from the Queen*

GURKHA MUSEUM

THE GURKHA MUSEUM

Research material sourced from The Gurkha Museum.
For more information, please visit The Gurkha Museum Trust, Peninsula Barracks, Romsey Road, Winchester, Hampshire, SO23 8TS.
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JAMES MAGENNIS

On 31 July 1945, the Japanese cruiser Takao sat at anchor in Singapore dockyard. Little did her crew know that beneath the surface, this Royal Navy diver placed the magnetic mines that would take her out of the war

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

The Takao, a heavy cruiser, was a threat to US and Allied forces throughout the Pacific War. It had been in action since 1941 and participated in many engagements, sinking enemy shipping and supporting landings and evacuations. It had also survived several engagements where many Japanese ships had been sunk. With the sinking of her three sister ships, Atago, Maya and Chokai in late 1944, Takao, although damaged, remained a major threat in the theatre.

As the Allied armies advanced towards Singapore, the Takao needed to be dealt with. The Royal Navy launched Operation Struggle on 31 July 1945, to do just that.

The operation used midget submarines, HMS XE3 assigned to deal with the Takao and HMS XE1 the Myoko, another heavy cruiser in Singapore dockyard. The XE midget submarines had a crew of four: C/O, deputy, ERA (Engine Room Artificer) and a seaman, and at least one was a qualified diver. On the XE3, the diver was Acting Leading-Seaman James Joseph Magennis.

British midget submarines had proven their worth against the Tirpitz in Norway in September 1943 and the XE series improved in the original design. The XE3 carried two, two-ton Amatol side charges and six limpet mines which would be attached to the hull of the target by the diver. The midget craft were towed some of the way to Singapore by S-class submarines and then made their way independently through the Strait of Johore and into Singapore dockyard. The journey took 13 hours and at various points the Japanese defenders came within metres of spotting the XE3. The Takao was camouflaged and took some time to locate. Unknown to the XE3, the commander of the XE1, Lt. John Smart, decided it was too risky to travel the further two miles into the harbour to reach the Myoko and so he decided to target the Takao as well, dropping his Amatol charges beneath her hull.

"DESPITE HIS EXHAUSTION, HIS OXYGEN LEAK AND THE FACT THAT THERE WAS EVERY PROBABILITY OF HIS BEING SIGHTED, MAGENNIS AT ONCE VOLUNTEERED TO LEAVE THE CRAFT AND FREE THE CARRIER RATHER THAN ALLOW A LESS EXPERIENCED DIVER TO UNDERTAKE THE JOB"

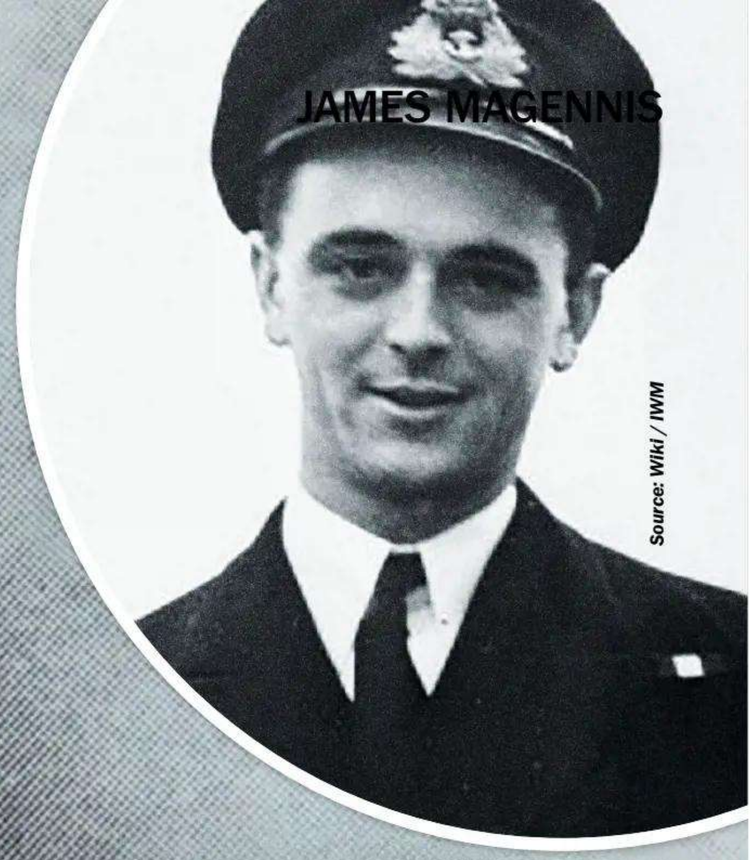
London Gazette

James Magennis (the surname can also be found spelled 'McGinnes' and he was called both 'Jim' and 'Mick' in the Navy) was born in the poor neighbourhood of West Belfast in 1919. In 1934, Magennis's older brother, Bill, joined the Royal Navy and in 1935 James followed him, enlisting as a 15-year-old boy recruit.

He had attempted to enlist in the army but was told he was too poorly educated. Magennis trained at the HMS Ganges at Shotley for nine months before joining the fleet. As a first-class boy he served on the battleship Royal Sovereign, the cruisers Dauntless and Enterprise, and then the aircraft carrier Hermes.

When war broke out Magennis was assigned to the destroyer HMS Kandahar, serving in the North Sea and Mediterranean before it struck a mine in December 1941. In 1942 Magennis was drafted to HMS Defiance torpedo school in Devonport intended to serve on the new cruiser HMS Belfast. Before that, however, he was drafted into the submarine service, training at HMS Dolphin at Gosport. He then joined H50 in February 1943. In March Magennis volunteered to join the special service in the new X-craft. He trained in Scotland at the shore base HMS Varbell, there learning to dive. He then took part in Operation Source, the attack on the Tirpitz by X-craft, serving on X7 – he was mentioned in despatches for his conduct in this mission.

In 1944 Magennis was chosen for service on a new XE series of midget submarines,



Source: Wiki / IWM

Both James Magennis (left) and his C/O Ian Fraser (inset) received the Victoria Cross for the raid against the Takao

"STAND BY TO GET UNDER WAY AND I HOPE THE LUCK OF THE IRISH IS WITH US. UP PERISCOPE"

Lieutenant Ian Fraser, C/O of XE3

© TopFoto

which would be going into operation against Japan. Unusually Magennis was chosen as the diver, a job usually reserved for officers. Training for the new craft took place in summer 1944, at the same time as the D-Day landings, and lasted six months.

Divers were trained in wire-cutting to make a hole for the X-craft to pass through as well as the placement of limpet mines. When training was complete, the new craft and crews sailed for the Pacific via the Azores, Trinidad, the Panama Canal, Hawaii and Brisbane before reaching Sydney. There they prepared for action, hoping that the war was not already considered won.

The cruiser Takao was reached by XE3 at about 7.00am on 1 August. The crew had travelled all night without sleep and through 80 miles of mined enemy waters. C/O Fraser dived his midget submarine to the bottom of the harbour and Magennis took the opportunity for a short sleep.

The crew also took Benzedrine tablets so that they would feel refreshed when the boat returned to periscope depth. They passed Changi prison and hoped the boom across the strait would be up, otherwise Magennis would need to cut a hole through it. They were in luck and the boom was raised. They moved forward, narrowly avoiding being spotted by a troop-ship. Magennis began the arduous process of suiting up in the cramped conditions of the submarine. XE3 had been submerged for seven hours.

"HIS CHEST FAIRLY HEAVED AS HE PANTED FOR BREATH IN THE OXYGEN-SCARCE ATMOSPHERE OF THE BOAT AND THE MUSCLES OF HIS ARMS GLEAMING AND RIPPLED AS HE PULLED THE TIGHT RUBBER NECK PIECE UP UNDER HIS ARMS"

Lieutenant Ian Fraser, C/O of XE3

C/O Fraser put the XE3 on the bottom amidship of the Takao with only a foot of clearance above her to the keel of the heavy cruiser. Magennis entered the wet and dry compartment of the submarine and flooded it, ready for his dive. He found, however, that the hatch would not open all the way as it struck the keel of the Takao before it was fully open. Magennis, showing remarkable bravery and ingenuity, removed his breathing apparatus and squeezed through the gap and then replaced his breathing apparatus. The water was very murky and visibility was poor.

The hull of the Takao was covered in barnacles and seaweed. Magennis would have to clear six spaces for the midget submarine's limpet mines; he found that their magnets would not hold to the hull without a clean surface and they kept sliding off. Magennis returned to the submarine, removed his breathing apparatus again and squeezed back in. Finding some rope aboard, he repeated his arduous procedure back out to the hull of the Takao. The squeeze was tighter this time owing to the falling tide.

Once back under the Takao, Magennis used the rope to clear a space for each mine. In doing so he cut his hands and his suit on the razor-sharp barnacles, causing his suit to leak, oxygen bubbles rising from it to the surface. He later estimated that he spent at least 45 minutes placing the mines. Magennis placed them in pairs, one on each side of the keel. His return to the XE3 was even more difficult than his second exit but he managed to squeeze in a final time.

C/O Fraser later marvelled at the number of firsts Magennis had achieved: he was the first diver to remove and reattach his breathing apparatus, the first Royal Navy diver to place mines on an enemy ship, the first to leave

The heavy cruiser Takao looked "as big as a bloody battleship" according to C/O Fraser

A midget submarine XE-8, of the British Royal Navy, travels up the Thames River, 1952



© Alamy



Source: Wiki / IJN

and return, and leave again. Fraser now found he had difficulties of his own; the falling tide meant the XE3 was all but wedged against the sea bottom and the Takao's keel. Fraser was only able to free the submarine by blowing his ballast tanks and therefore surfacing momentarily. He then released both of the submarine's Amatol explosive charges. One of the Amatol carriers, however, did not detach following this and had become flooded with water, making it impossible for the submarine to move. Fraser intended to dive to release the carrier manually but Magennis was still in his diving gear and asked that he be allowed (as the diver) to go – he just needed five minutes to get his breath back.

They waited and Magennis went out again and released the flooded carrier. This took seven minutes and Magennis risked being spotted at any moment. Eventually the carrier fell away, allowing the submarine to escape. It was still not safe, however, and had to race the tide to reach the open sea again through the same 80 miles of mined enemy seaway. The XE3 reached open sea at 9.00pm that night. When they reached the HM/SM Stygian again at 11.50pm they had been operating for 52 hours without a break.

The crew of the Stygian reported a huge explosion at 9.30pm and they XE3 crew later learned that the XE1 had dropped its Amatol under the Takao too (although they had not placed any mines). The explosives tore a 60-foot hole in the hull and put the Takao's guns out of action. Plans for XE3 to return and sink the Myoko were made but Japan's surrender on 15 August made that mission unnecessary.

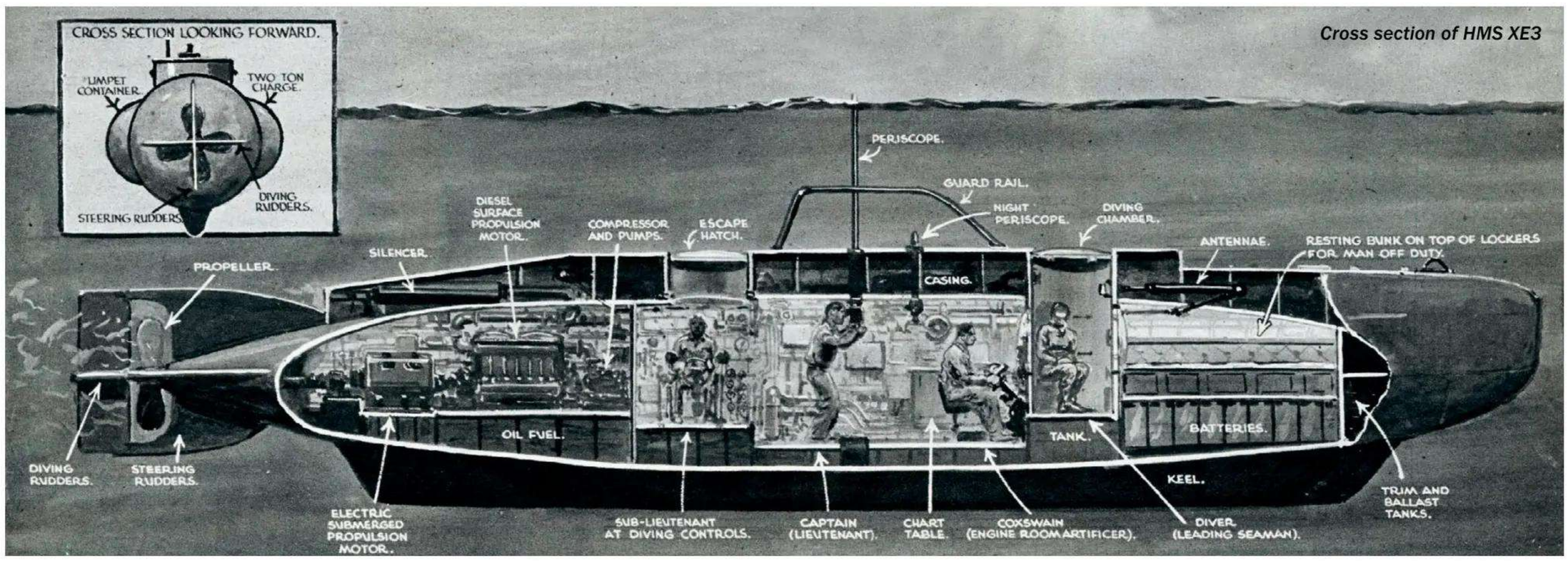
James Magennis was the first junior rating from the submarine service to be honoured with a Victoria Cross. Only two other junior ratings received Britain's highest military honour during the Second World War, but both of those citations were posthumous. In addition to Magennis's Victoria Cross, his commanding officer, Lieutenant Ian Fraser, also received the Victoria Cross (and later wrote *Frogman VC* in 1957); the XE3 Deputy, Sub-Lieutenant William 'Kiwi' Smith received the DSO, and the ERA, Alfred Reed, received the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. The crew of the XE1 received DSOs and DSMs.

The limelight into which Magennis was thrust was completely unexpected. He was feted in Sydney and flown home especially on a Sunderland Flying Boat. The flight took them to Singapore where the hulk of the Takao and the Myoko were being used to hold Japanese prisoners. However, it did not take long for the political and religious divisions in Northern Ireland. To make mileage out of Magennis's medal, he was turned into both a political and religious pariah. This began even before Magennis had received his medal (at Buckingham Palace on 15 December). He was welcomed in Belfast in late 1945 but the welcome was short lived. As a boy recruit in 1935, Magennis still had four years of service left (he would need to enlist for a further ten if he wanted a pension). He demobilised in 1949 but by then had been demoted (due to drunkenness and a period in detention). He returned to Belfast but suffered ill-health and by 1952 was broke. He sold his medal for £75.

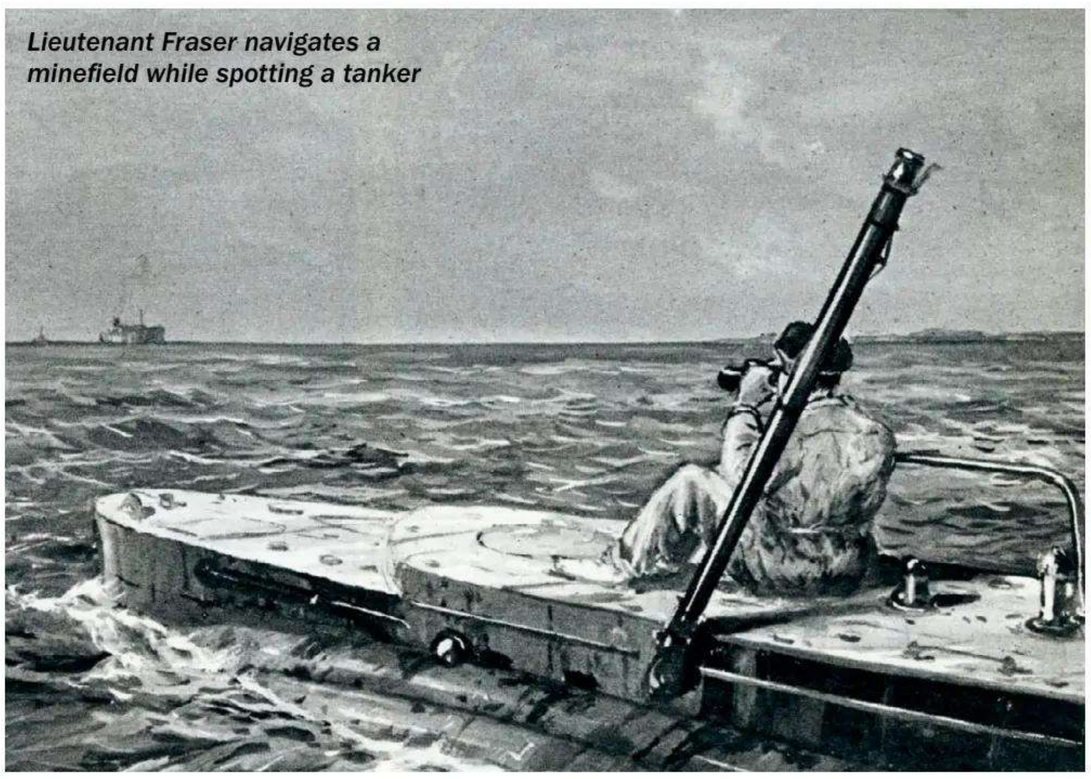
Marmaduke Furness, Viscount Furness discovered the circumstances of the sale and bought it back for him (although Magennis being returned his Victoria Cross was turned into a humiliating news story). This event seems to have cemented the idea for Magennis to leave Belfast and Ireland permanently. As a Roman Catholic, Magennis was shunned in Belfast after WWII; the city did not appreciate a British war hero and Magennis moved to Doncaster and then Bradford.

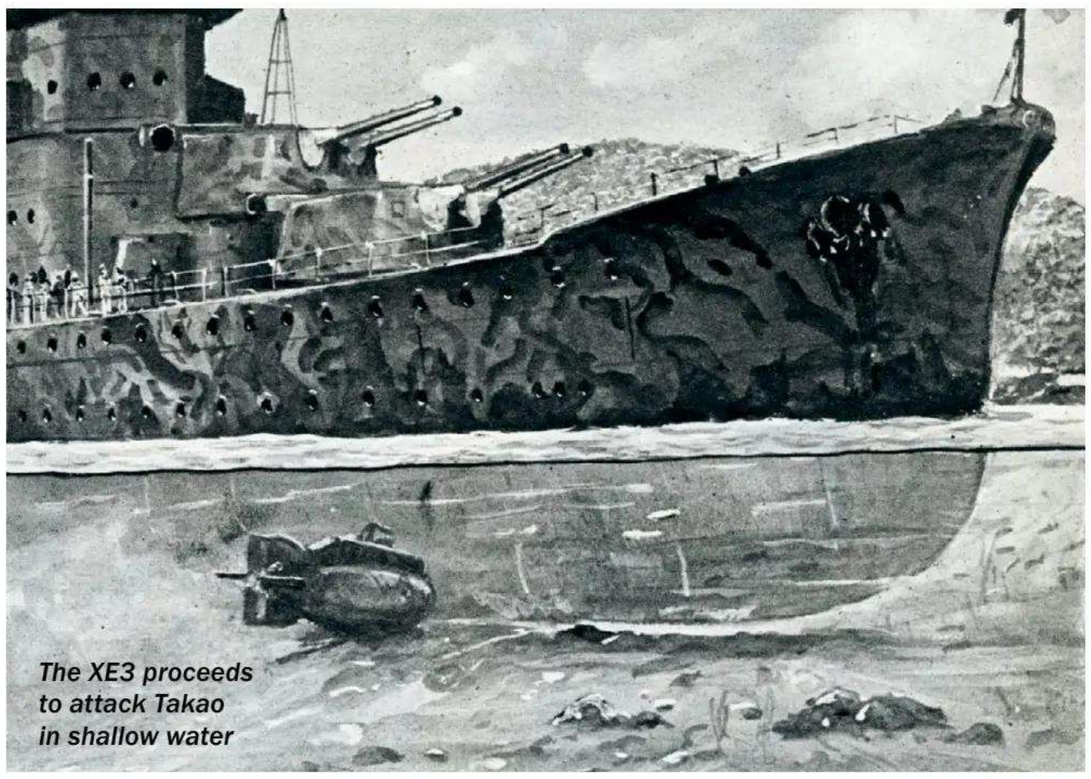
His status as the first Northern Irish Victoria Cross recipient was ignored for many years although he was honoured in Bradford. The Magennis Victoria Cross was also the first purchased by Lord Ashcroft in 1986, soon after Magennis's death from bronchitis at the age of 65. A plaque commemorating his home was finally erected in Belfast in 1998 and a memorial statue erected in Belfast in 1999.

On that occasion his former commanding officer, Ian Fraser, remarked, "I have never met a braver man."



Cross section of HMS XE3

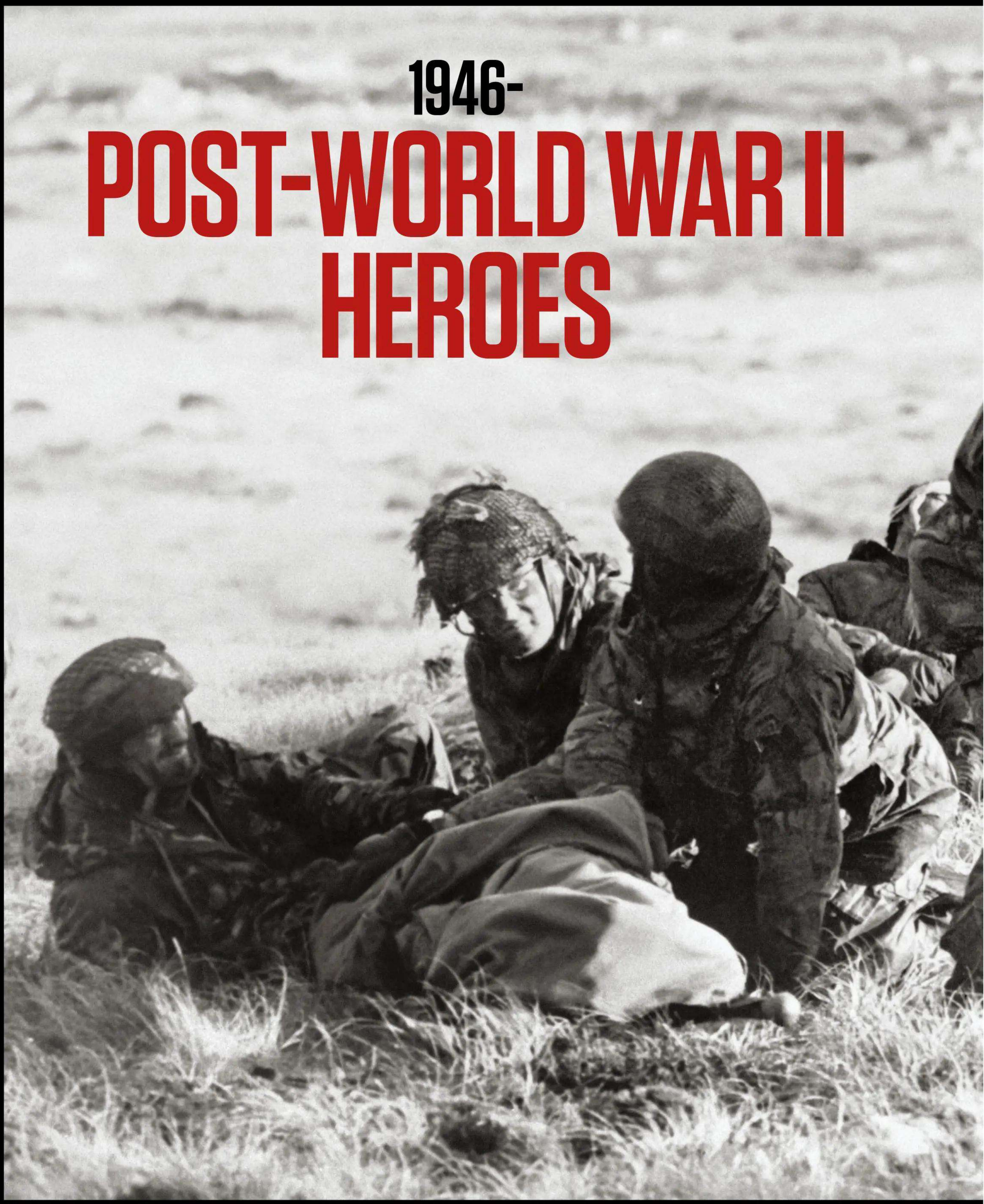

Lieutenant Fraser navigates a minefield while spotting a tanker


The XE3 proceeds to attack Takao in shallow water

© Mary Evans

1946-

POST-WORLD WAR II HEROES



104 KEITH PAYNE
108 JOHNSON BEHARRY
112 IAN MCKAY
116 RAMBAHADUR LIMBU
120 PETER BADCOE
124 WILLIE APIATA

© Getty Images



KEITH PAYNE

Under monsoon conditions in the Central Vietnamese Highlands, this Australian soldier ignored his injuries to hold back a communist attack and to ensure that no man was left behind

WORDS **LOUIS HARDIMAN**

Warrant Officer Keith Payne strode towards the commander of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam's (AATTV) office. Raising a right arm scarred by shrapnel injuries sustained four months earlier, he knocked on the door. Payne bristled as the voice from within shouted out: "Come." Standing to attention before the lieutenant, he was stunned to hear: "Allow me to be the first to congratulate you. The Queen has awarded you the Victoria Cross." "Oh, shit," Payne muttered under his breath as the lieutenant reached forward to shake his hand.

Payne was not the first in his family to have a distinguished military career. His father was absent for much of the Second World War, posted to the Pacific theatre. Just six years old when the war broke out, Payne had to grow up quickly and helped keep his family fed using the hunting and fishing skills taught by his father. Payne left school at 14 and, bored by his apprenticeship as a cabinet maker, enlisted in the Australian Army at 18.

A year later he had his first taste of combat, serving in the Korean War. Returning in 1953, he met and married Florence 'Flo' Plaw, a member of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps. Payne held operational duties while he started his family, before serving in Malaya (1965), Papua New Guinea (1967) and Vietnam (1969). After each tour of duty, he would be itching to get back into the thick of it. Flo later reflected on her husband's two-year wait for deployment in Vietnam: "I don't know what was going to be worse… him being in Vietnam or having him at home moaning and groaning because he couldn't get to Vietnam." Payne was assigned to the AATTV, responsible for training and advising indigenous soldiers against the North Vietnamese. Yet the AATTV's actual duties were far more expansive than this, frequently fighting alongside the South Vietnamese, earning 100 decorations that included four Victoria Crosses.



Right: An Aussie soldier signals to a 'Huey', August 1969

Payne's VC-winning action came during monsoon season in the hills of Vietnam's Central Highlands. He was deployed at Ben Het Camp as commander of the 212th Company in the 1st Mobile Strike Force Battalion. Ben Het had been in the North Vietnamese's sights for years, primarily because of its 7in (175mm) self-propelled guns that had been pouring tons of ordnance onto enemy positions.

Earlier that year, the camp had faced an armoured assault in which the North Vietnamese struck with PT-76 light tanks and scores of BTR-50 armoured personnel carriers, backed by deadly recoilless rifle fire and heavy shelling. The attack collapsed after a PT-76 drove over an anti-tank mine, the blast highlighting the North Vietnamese positions for the US tankers. The enemy retreated under concentrated fire from four M-48s, the first generation of American main battle tanks (MBT). The enemy left behind the wrecks of two PT-76s and a BTR-50, but the defenders of Ben Het knew more attacks would follow.

Another major assault came during Payne's deployment at Ben Het, which was foiled thanks to his VC-winning heroism. On 24 May, Payne's AATTV unit and their South Vietnamese comrades were attacked by a force surrounding them on three sides. Geysers of mud sprang up from the shaking ground as mortars and rockets detonated all around and North Vietnamese soldiers pushed

Images: Alamy, Getty

"THIS SOLDIER SHOWS US A TIMELESS LESSON, IN BOTH WORD AND IN DEED – LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND"

Maj. Mark Wales, (Ret.)

forward. Under the bombardment, few South Vietnamese troops were able to return fire. As the most capable and experienced soldier present, Payne's responsibility was to prevent them from being overrun. Exposing himself to enemy fire, he sprinted between positions, constantly seeking better firing angles. He stopped at each trench long enough to hurl a few grenades and loose a volley from his rifle, before moving off again. Payne's efforts made the North Vietnamese think twice about a headlong charge but earned him shrapnel wounds to both hands and arms.

He could only hold off the enemy temporarily. The South Vietnamese soon gave way and the battalion commander and several advisors joined the withdrawal. The retreat was disorderly and any North Vietnamese advance would be unchecked. Payne spotted the danger and opted not to join the retreat, instead drawing fire and holding back the chase.

Payne successfully delayed the North Vietnamese advance but once he was left behind, with only the American medic Jerry Dellwo for company, it was time to fall back. He organised the remnants of the 212th and another company to establish a defensive perimeter that could hold overnight. Once darkness set in, Payne sallied out of the perimeter to search for survivors. His mission almost ended before it had started when he bumped into two enemy, but Payne was able to fend them off in close quarters before marching through the battlefield. After three hours of searching, often coming under fire from North Vietnamese patrols, he had gathered 40 stragglers. Many were walking wounded and needed assistance to get back to the perimeter. Payne's band of warriors made it, but their comrades had deserted them and left the perimeter unguarded. They had to keep moving to reach the battalion base. Payne assisted a seriously wounded American Special Forces advisor, Sergeant Anastacio Montez. Sadly, Montez died of his wounds en route.

The danger was far from over for the Ben Het camp: North Vietnamese forces had laid siege and fighting continued throughout June. However, Payne's efforts helped to prevent the camp from being overrun and allowed South Vietnamese troops and their coalition of advisors to bed in against further attacks. With their infantry battered, the North Vietnamese relied on the 40th Artillery Regiment, which moved in close to Ben Het and Dak To eight miles (13km) to the east. They unloaded countless 4.8in (122mm) rockets into the camps while American aircraft flew sorties against them. Reporting for The New York Times, B Drummond Ayers described the chaos: "Ben Het at night is a scene that is at once beautiful and fascinating, weird and horrible. Dali, Goya, Bach, The Beatles,



Above: Payne (right) with Queen Elizabeth II alongside fellow Australian Mark Donaldson VC



Above: Payne's wife and their five children read about his VC-winning exploits



Hemingway and Zanuck would understand. Flares hang in the sky, casting milky, light purple shadows. A plane drones and circles overhead, periodically spitting streams of fiery tracers at enemy positions."

The siege was eventually lifted on 1 July when 2,400 South Vietnamese troops drove through the jungle from Dak To. Tidy-up operations and supply drops continued throughout July and the North Vietnamese began to filter back to their base in Cambodia. Scores as B-52 Stratofortresses rained down bombs on their retreat. Two companies, totalling around 200 men, were all that was left of the 1,000 28th Regiment men who had joined the assault on Ben Het.

The camp may have fallen had Payne not shown such heroism. Instead, it survived until October 1972, when 1,500 rounds of artillery, rockets and mortars forced the South Vietnamese defenders to flee. Of the 300-man garrison, 140 escaped. Payne had already received his VC by this time, gazetted on 19 September 1969. Four Australians won the VC in Vietnam, and became known as the 'Four Kings of Phuoc Tuy'. Payne was the last of them and also the final Australian to receive the Imperial Victoria Cross before the creation of the Australian version of the medal.

Payne returned to Australia shortly after earning his VC, evacuated back to Brisbane due to illness. After a stay in hospital, he was transferred to the Royal Military College at Duntroon in Canberra as an instructor, finally receiving his VC from Queen Elizabeth II aboard the Royal Yacht Britannia on 13 April 1970. His VC group, comprising 23 medals, has now been donated to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Although Payne retired from the Australian Army in 1975, it was not the last he would see of active service. He was frustrated by Australia's failure to intervene in the Dhofar War, which saw the Sultan of Oman, aided by Iran, Great Britain and Jordan, take on communist rebels from the Dhofar Liberation Front. Payne travelled to Oman in 1976 to fight with the Royal Army as a captain for one year.

Risking his life in several war zones left Payne with physical and mental scars. He continued to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and dealt with anger and drinking issues in the past.

In the 2020 documentary Australian Hero: Keith Payne VC, he said to filmmaker Max Uechtritz that he had told himself: "Get yourself together, Payne, yer bloody donkey! What are you doing?" Payne went on to work as a full-time representative of the Returned Services League of Australia, fundraising and counselling others living with PTSD. Explaining the importance of such work, he said: "We can't let it go [on for] another generation." He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his role as an "advocate for veterans' health and welfare".

Using the cover of a smoke screen, a plane drops supplies near Ben Het late in the siege

"I FIRST MET KEITH PAYNE IN VIETNAM AND WAS IN AWE OF THIS UNDERSTATED HERO WHOSE LIFE-SAVING ACTIONS IN COMBAT BECAME A TREASURED AUSTRALIAN LEGEND"

General Sir Peter Cosgrove

Images: Alamy, Getty



JOHNSON BEHARRY

Two acts of valour from this young private saved the lives of his comrades in the narrow streets of Al Amarah, Iraq

WORDS **JACKSON VAN UDEN**

Johnson Beharry did not have an easy life growing up. Born in 1979 in Grenada, then recently independent from British rule, the Beharry family lived in poverty. During the early days of the post-independence, Marxist-Leninist regime, the young Beharry had to walk three miles (5km) to school barefoot.

This difficult start to life set Beharry on his journey to joining the British Army as he saved up enough money to move to the UK when he was 20. Yet he would not join the army immediately after arriving in West London; instead, he continued to work as a labourer on building sites, as he had done in Grenada since he was just 13.

While living in the UK, Beharry almost became caught up with West London gangs, but in August 2001 enlisted and joined the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment. Just a month later, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York would set world events in motion that would soon lead Beharry to war.

During training, Beharry qualified as a Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle driver. While serving in the coalition counter-insurgency in Iraq, his training would eventually enable him to not only save his own life but also the lives of those serving around him on two separate occasions, leading to him being awarded the Victoria Cross for "two individual acts of great heroism". According to Beharry, one of the acts he can recall, and the other he cannot.



***Above:** Beharry was driving a Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle during the two ambushes in Al Amarah that later saw him receive the Victoria Cross*

His first act occurred in the early hours of 1 May 2004, in the dark streets around Al Amarah in south-east Iraq. Beharry had been assigned to be part of the Quick Reaction Force and its duty was to be on hand to provide support and help for the patrol that was operating on foot in the city. His commander had decided to set up their vehicle unit halfway between the patrol in the city and camp to allow for quick deployment.

Al Amarah had been an anti-Saddam Hussein stronghold during his premiership, but in 2003 the city turned against the British Army that had previously supported them. Militias and various forces from the city attacked British patrols at every opportunity, making this a dangerous place for Beharry's comrades. After only 12 minutes of waiting at the checkpoint, Beharry's company received a call for help. At the head of his unit, Beharry drove toward the city with the assistance of his commander, who was in the Warrior with him and helped him navigate through the streets – providing an alternative route for the convoy when the route was blocked.

Suddenly, the roar of an explosion bellowed its way through Beharry's vehicle. He called

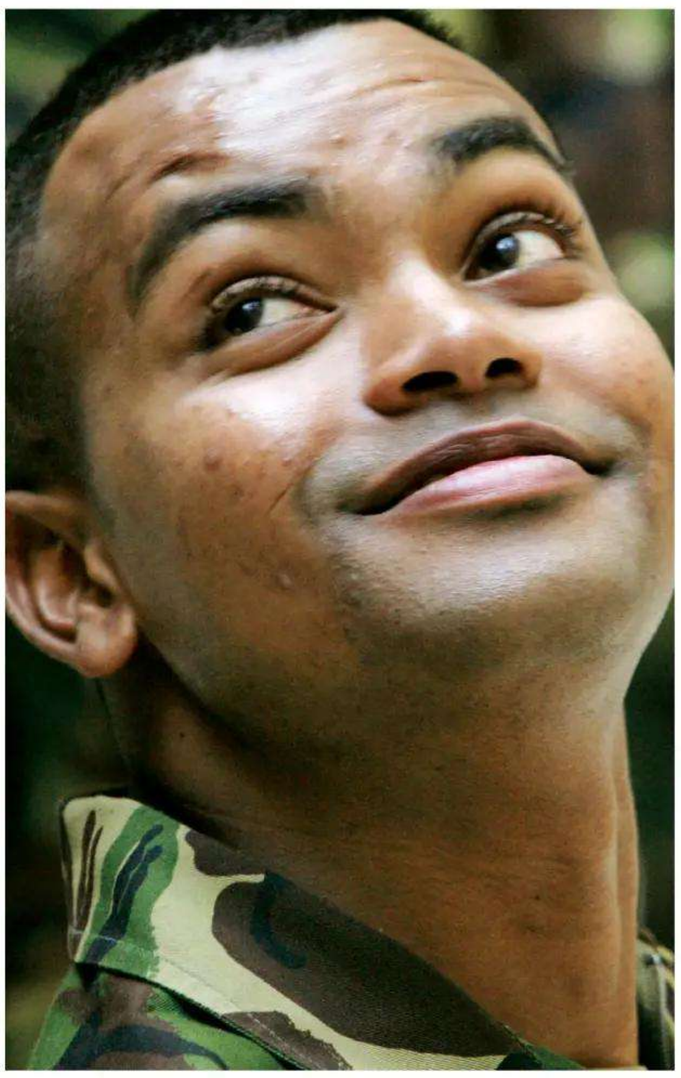
Johnson Beharry posing with his Victoria Cross medal



Beharry at the unveiling of his portrait that hangs at the National Portrait Gallery, 2007

to his commander: no reply. He crept his vehicle forward, unsure if he had been hit. Another explosion rocked the vehicle. Another unanswered call to his commander. Beharry realised that their Warrior had been hit and was on fire, and that they were in the middle of an ambush from the rooftops of nearby buildings as bullets, rockets, grenades and shrapnel flew around and into his vehicle. He said to himself "I'm not going to die!" and then thought of his convoy: "I can't leave the guys behind because the guys will die." Mustering up the courage, Beharry saw an exit route which lay behind a wall. He drove his battered Warrior through the wall and into the streets on the other side.

Yet he was not presented with a route to freedom as he'd believed, instead he was presented with a choice. In front of him, in the middle of the street, lay a landmine. He realised that if he drove over the mine there was a 50% chance he would die, and a 50% chance he would survive to help his comrades. Whereas if he left them in the ambush, they would all die. On fire, isolated and wounded, Beharry drove his Warrior over the mine. Bracing for death, he instead heard loud explosions as his Warrior powered onward through the streets of Al Amarah, deeper into the kill zone.



***Above:** Beharry shortly after being awarded the Victoria Cross in 2005 for his acts of bravery in Iraq*

He finally found the rest of his company as they made their way to a safe point. As they came to a stop, he called for help, but no help came to him in his burning Warrior. He then continued on and, as his Victoria Cross citation recounted, "without thought for his own personal safety" climbed out of his fiery Warrior. "Seemingly oblivious to the incoming enemy small arms fire" he repeatedly climbed back into and onto his Warrior as he "manhandled his wounded platoon commander out of the turret, off the vehicle and to the safety of a nearby Warrior" and carried the rest of his team to safety.

Once again putting duty above his own safety, Beharry sought to save his 'pride and joy' as he attempted to drive his Warrior to safety. When it became apparent to him that he could not save the vehicle, he quickly set about immobilising and disabling it to ensure that British Intelligence and property did not fall into the hands of the enemy, before escaping in the back of another Warrior. During this first valiant action, Beharry saved the lives of 30 men while narrowly avoiding losing his own. The next day one of his commanding officers told him: "What you did yesterday was outstanding."

Heat stroke, an injured spine and a graze from a bullet on his scalp didn't stop Beharry



Beharry with his comrades – Lieutenant Colonel Matt Maer is top-left

from carrying on with his duties, and on 11 June 2004, only six weeks later, he once again found himself as the lead driver of a Quick Reaction Force of four in the deadly streets of Al Amarah. However, this time Beharry and his comrades were briefed on the location of their enemy, and they believed that they were going to hunt down and cut off a mortar team that had been attacking Coalition forces.

However, once again Beharry and his men drove into another ambush, being immediately greeted by a loud chorus of gunfire and rocket explosions emanating from the surrounding rooftops. Commenting on the ambush, he later jokingly said in an interview: "I must point out I don't like driving into an ambush because it's not nice!" During the relentless battering of his vehicle, Beharry had another close encounter with death as a rocket exploded inches away from his head, severely injuring him and incapacitating his crew.

Lieutenant Colonel Matt Maer later recalled: "Had it not been for the fact that Beharry is tall and preferred to lean back in his seat while driving he would've almost certainly been killed outright." With his face severely injured and blood blinding him as it poured down his face and into his eyes,

"DURING THIS FIRST VALIANT ACTION, BEHARRY SAVED THE LIVES OF 30 MEN WHILE NARROWLY AVOIDING LOSING HIS OWN. ONE OF HIS COMMANDING OFFICERS THE NEXT DAY TOLD BEHARRY 'WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY WAS OUTSTANDING'"

Beharry was able to throw his Warrior into reverse – a feat he achieved under immense pressure and that he has no recollection of – and drove himself and his crew out of the kill zone, with his Warrior coming to rest against a wall as he fell unconscious. Beharry and the crew were quickly extracted and treated for their wounds. Maer recalled a conversation with a doctor who confirmed to him that Beharry had suffered a severe brain injury, a crushed forehead, damage to his eye sockets and a burst right frontal lobe. Beharry himself recalls that he had a 1% chance of survival. Despite these injuries, his actions undoubtedly saved the lives of countless men.

While he admits he can't quite remember the six weeks between the two incidents, or the second incident at all, Johnson Beharry VC is still one of the most inspiring heroes of the Victoria Cross, and his citation commends his display of "repeated extreme gallantry and unquestioned valour, despite intense direct attacks, personal injury and damage to his vehicle in the face of relentless enemy action".

In the years following his service in Iraq, Beharry created the Johnson Beharry VC Foundation, which helps young people leave street gangs and develop careers – young people who are in the same vulnerable position Beharry was in before he joined the British Army. Beharry's charity work, as well as his inspiring story on the frontline, has made him a hero not only the United Kingdom but also in his homeland of Grenada, where he received the Companion of the Order of Grenada in 2017.

Images: Alamy, Getty



IAN McKAY

With his comrades shielding against a hail of machine-gun fire, this courageous young platoon sergeant made the ultimate sacrifice to secure a vital objective in the war to retake the Falklands

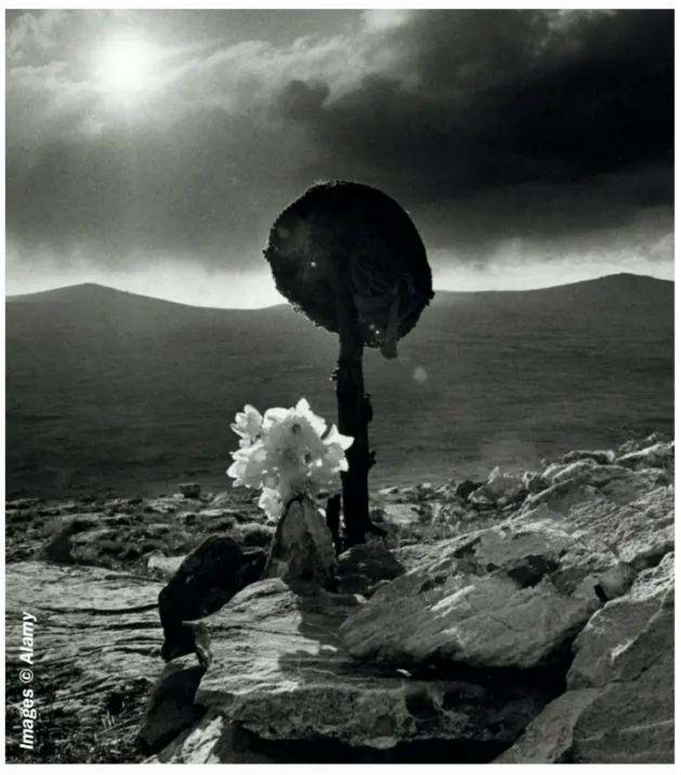
WORDS **CHARLES GINGER**

All around him crouched khaki-coloured figures wincing and swearing at the relentless thud of bullets punching holes in the mud and ricocheting off rocks, the only shelter Mount Longdon had to offer its new assailants. Someone screamed as another bullet fired from the ridge above found its mark. They'd already lost a platoon commander to a leg wound, and now they were all sitting ducks. They had to move, had to gain the ridge and silence those guns. Deep down, Sergeant Ian McKay knew he'd have to get the job done.

With a mix of gestures and shouts he summoned three men to his side and, as calmly as he could, instructed them on what they all had to do. Nervous glances were followed by stern nods. Steeling himself against the storm to come, McKay rose up from behind his bullet-riddled shelter and raced up the slope, his comrades sprinting behind him.

McKay had always been prepared to be brave. He'd spent the 12 years prior to the Battle of Mount Longdon training to show courage under fire. Born on 7 May 1953 in the South Yorkshire village of Wortley, by 1970, while still a teenager, McKay successfully navigated the Parachute Regiment's gruelling selection process, and by the following year he was a serving member of the 1st Battalion, or 1 PARA.

Five years serving in Germany, Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK were followed in 1976 by a two-year spell as a corporal instructor. After spending 1978 through to 1980 as part of 3 PARA, McKay returned to Depot (located at Browning Barracks Aldershot). Here he would gain crucial experience in weapons training and climb the ladder to become a platoon sergeant of 4 Platoon, B Company, 3 PARA.


Images © Alamy

Just under two months after McKay's promotion the UK found herself at war. Desperate to distract a struggling populace from Argentina's dire economic situation, not to mention its own ruthless methods of retaining power, the nation's ruling military junta made a fateful miscalculation in April 1982 and invaded the Falkland Islands, situated 1,520km off Argentina's southern tip.

Known in Argentina as Islas Malvinas, the British islands had long been coveted by the leaders of the South American state, military commanders who had already inflamed tensions with the UK on 19 March by slipping a party of scrap metal workers onto South Georgia island to the east of the Falklands. Once ashore (having been guided by Argentine marines) they raised the blue and white flag of Argentina, a clear provocation aimed at the UK. The junta thought the British government would never resort to military force in the face of further Argentinian aggression, but the speed and scale of the UK's response to the invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April would prove them spectacularly wrong.

By 11 June, after almost ten weeks of bloodshed, the UK's military forces were poised to deliver the coup de grace to a

A makeshift memorial marks the spot on Mount Longdon, where McKay was killed while taking out a position

Sergeant Ian McKay, pictured here in his Parachute Regiment uniform alongside a canine companion

"WITHOUT DOUBT SERGEANT MCKAY'S ACTION RETRIEVED A MOST DANGEROUS SITUATION AND WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ENSURING THE SUCCESS OF THE ATTACK"

VC Citation

determined but doomed enemy. Having retreated to their defensive perimeter around Port Stanley (the islands' capital), Argentinian troops were dug in on the slopes of Mount Longdon ready to repel any British thrusts towards their remaining stronghold. According to one of McKay's letters home, nature would also play her part in trying to thwart them: "I have never known a more bleak, windswept and wet place. We spend our life with wet feet. You cannot walk 50 paces anywhere without walking into a bog."

After trekking across the island of East Falkland, 3rd Battalion conducted a silent assault on the mountain throughout the night of 11/12 June. Once the initial objectives had been secured, McKay found himself tasked with clearing the heavily defended north side of the east/west ridge that spanned the mountain.

Withering fire from enemy machine-gun nests quickly stalled 4 Platoon's advance, and as the men sought refuge they encountered comrades from 5 Platoon. While the majority of the British troops huddled behind rocks the commander of 5 Platoon led McKay and a cluster of troops towards the ridge in a bid to scout out the enemy positions. Within seconds a bullet pierced the commander's leg, and as he was carried off to safety overall command fell to McKay, who was now in charge of an increasingly perilous situation. The only way to avoid a massacre was to charge the enemy.

As McKay pounded towards the ridge bullets whistled and whirled past, felling two of his accomplices and killing the other. Yet somehow he managed to crest the top of the ridge unscathed and descend on a concrete bunker still spitting fire at the men below.

Coolly, methodically, he began to detach the grenades strapped to his belt, extract the pins and toss them inside the bunker as panicked Argentinian troops started to spill out into the crisp morning air. Explosions and juddering spurts of gunfire erupted, and something smashed into McKay and sent him reeling. The world shifted and blurred, but as McKay's legs buckled and he collapsed onto the roof of the bunker he knew that he'd saved the lives of his men.

"ONCE WE HAD THREE SONS. NOW WE HAVE NONE. IT'S ALMOST MORE THAN WE CAN BEAR"

Kenneth McKay, Ian's father, during a wreath-laying ceremony on 13 June 1998

The 29-year-old's selfless actions were crucial in clearing a path to taking control of Mount Longdon and thereby the road to Port Stanley and victory. A helmet propped on the end of a rifle formed part of a temporary grave to mark where he fell, a poignant symbol of his courage that was soon followed by a posthumous Victoria Cross. His incredible bravery was fully acknowledged in the citation that accompanied his VC.

Describing the aftermath of the failed attempt to reconnoitre the enemy positions, the citation stated: "It was clear that instant action was needed if the advance was not to falter and increasing casualties to ensue. Sergeant McKay decided to convert this reconnaissance into an attack in order to eliminate the enemy positions. He was in no doubt of the strength and deployment of the enemy as he undertook this attack. He issued orders, and taking three men with him, broke cover and charged the enemy position.

"The assault was met by a hail of fire. The Corporal was seriously wounded, a Private killed and another wounded. Despite these losses Sergeant McKay, with complete disregard for his own safety, continued to charge the enemy position alone. On reaching it he dispatched the enemy with grenades, thereby relieving the position of beleaguered 4 and 5 Platoons, who were now able to redeploy with relative safety. Sergeant McKay, however, was killed at the moment of victory, his body falling on the bunker."

McKay's body was flown home after the war (which ended just two days after his death) and was reburied at Aldershot Military Cemetery. Hailed by one of the last men to see him alive, Colour Sergeant Brian Faulkner, as "the bravest of the brave", McKay left behind a widow, Marica, who in later years made the tough decision to sell her husband's medals to Lord Michael Ashcroft. Today they are proudly on display in the Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum in London.

McKay also left a stepson, Don (from a previous relationship of Marica's), his daughter Melanie. His heartbroken parents, Kenneth and Freda, had already tragically had to bury McKay's older brothers after their deaths caused by cystic fibrosis. They, along with the men who fought beside McKay, will never forget the last Victoria Cross of the 20th century – earned by a man who willingly charged at death in order to save others.





Ian McKay's headstone at Aldershot Military Cemetery. In 2007, to mark the 25th anniversary of his death, his mother Freda opened an accommodation block at the Defence Academy Shrivenham

Soldiers carry out first aid on an injured comrade on Mount Longdon

Images © Alamy

The barren slopes of Mount Longdon, a strategically vital position that McKay's valiant actions helped to prise from the enemy



RAMBAHADUR LIMBU

Sarawak, Borneo, 21 November 1965 – Lance Corporal Rambahadur and two companions from his platoon crept to within ten feet before the enemy machine-gun post spotted them and opened up, raking them with bullets

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

In his brief autobiography, *My Life Story*, Rambahadur Limbu remembers how, as a young man, perhaps 15, he and two friends ran away from their Himalayan village of Chyangthapu to join the army as boy soldiers. Rambahadur had heard stories from his father who had served in the Gurkha during the Second World War fighting the Japanese. These stories inspired Rambahadur to want to be a soldier. His father died when he was eight (along with nine other members of his family leaving only Rambahadur and two brothers).

Unfortunately this first experience of army life was not what Rambahadur expected and he soon deserted and returned home. He left Chyangthapu again at 17 to seek work, first in Darjeeling and then in the kingdom of Sikkim, but ended up almost accidentally joining the army again in November 1957 at 19 despite his fears that he might be recognised as the boy soldier who had deserted. He was not.

Rambahadur had grown from 4'4" (132cm) to his adult height by this time and later assumed this was why he was not recognised. He took the Gurkha oath of allegiance, his right hand on the Union Jack repeating the oath in front of a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II. By December 1957 he was in Malaya training at Sungei Patani. After ten months of training he joined the Second Battalion of the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles at the Majedee Barracks in Johore Bahru in October 1958. He made several patrols during the next few years during the Malayan Emergency but the enemy continued to elude his platoon's ambushes. He saw some dead insurgents killed by the First Battalion but saw no real action himself although he was made intimately aware of jungle operations. This experience would be invaluable in Borneo.

On leave in 1961 Rambahadur married. He was promoted to Lance Corporal in 1963 and by that time serious troubles had begun in Borneo, especially Brunei and Sarawak. At the conclusion of the Malayan Emergency in July 1960, plans were put into place to incorporate British North Borneo and Singapore into Greater Malaysia. This idea was met with fierce opposition from President Sukarno of Indonesia and in 1962 Indonesia began supporting revolutionary factions on the large, dense jungle island of Borneo.

Below: Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu, 26, in London to receive the Victoria Cross from the Queen



The Confrontation proper broke out in December 1962 when companies of the North Kalimantan National Army (NKNA) attacked police stations in Sarawak and Brunei. British reinforcements were flown in quickly, the first two companies of the 1/2nd Gurkhas arriving within hours. Other reinforcements soon followed and by February all towns in Brunei and Sarawak had been cleared of rebels. The 1,600km border between Kalimantan and Sarawak, however, continued to be raided and troops of the Gurkhas, Royal Marines of 40 and 42nd Commandos, A Squadron of the 22nd Special Air Service, the armoured cars of the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars, and other units patrolled the border. All these troops amounted to some 14,000 men to patrol 1,000 miles of border, or only 14 men per mile.

With so few troops along such a massive border they were spread incredibly thin. Indonesian troops continued to mount raids across the border from 1963 (34 attacks were launched across the border in July 1964 alone). These raids met with varied success. More Commonwealth reinforcements, codenamed Spineforce, arrived in December 1963. In November 1964 Rambahadur joined his battalion on Borneo to patrol the Sarawak

"HIS ACTIONS ON THIS DAY REACHED A ZENITH OF DETERMINED, PRE-MEDITATED VALOUR WHICH MUST COUNT AMONGST THE MOST NOBLE ON RECORD AND IS DESERVING OF THE GREATEST ADMIRATION AND THE HIGHEST PRAISE"

Captain Rambahadur Limbu remains active in remembrance services around the Commonwealth

border. Many of these patrols were Claret Operations, activities on the Kalimantan side of the border and designed to keep Indonesian forces on the defensive. These were instigated by Director of Borneo Operations, Major-General Walter Walker in July 1964 and would continue until July 1966 under his successor Major-General George Lea.

During one such cross-border patrol in the Bau District (the extreme western edge) of Sarawak on 21 November 1965 men of C Company, 2/10th Gurkhas located a platoon-strength (30-40 men) enemy position entrenched on a sheer, T-shaped hill, 500 feet (152 metres) high.

The only approach to this position was along a knife-edge ridge. C Company's commanding officer, Captain "Kit" Maunsell, had 100 men under his command. They had departed at 6.00am and taken six hours to approach the enemy position unseen and it was now early afternoon. The terrain was incredibly difficult, consisting of nigh-on impenetrable Bekula ferns. An advance of 150 metres an hour was considered to be good progress.

The three men of Rambahadur's bren gun support group from 7 Platoon, he and riflemen Kharkabahadur Limbu and Bijuliparsad Rai, were in the van of the advance on the left of the enemy position. Rambahadur was in charge of positioning, directing and supervising the bren which his two riflemen operated – one carried the ammunition and reloaded, the other carried the LMG and fired it.

The men crept forward to within only four metres of the first enemy trench when the machine-gunner manning the trench spotted them. He immediately opened fire and Bijuliparsad, to Rambahadur's right was hit. Rambahadur rushed forward and killed the sentry, taking possession of the enemy trench alone. The entire enemy force was now alerted to the Gurkhas' presence and opened fire on them, concentrating their fire on the trench which Rambahadur occupied.

Rambahadur realised that he could not support the advance of his own platoon from the enemy trench position and so left the safety of the trench under sustained and heavy enemy fire in order to lead his bren group to a better position, some 25 metres away. He shouted and pointed his intentions to the platoon commander, Ranjit Rai, and then advanced, yet again, into a hail of enemy fire. In this second advance both Bijuliparsad and Kharkabahadur were seriously wounded.

According to his own recollection, seeing his comrades' blood made his own blood boil and "blood for blood and nothing but blood could settle the account", but seeing them incapacitated he realised that he needed to aid them rather than continue the attack alone.

Under furious and accurate enemy fire from at least two machine-gun posts, Rambahadur made his way towards his wounded men. He inched forward towards them but as he reached out to the closest wounded man he was driven back by enemy fire. Rambahadur realised that only speed would allow him to rescue his comrades. He rushed forward and threw himself beside the first of them.

Directing two LMGs which had come up in support on his right, he hoisted the rifleman and carried him to safety. He immediately returned, still under fire, to the side of the second wounded rifleman. According to his citation, the enemy now concentrated even more fire on Rambahadur to prevent the rescue of his comrade, but the lance corporal made a series of short rushes to the side of the wounded rifleman. At one point he was pinned down for several minutes by accurate fire, bullets striking all around him. He reached the second wounded man, hoisted him on his shoulders and carried him to safety. The entire action took 20 minutes and Rambahadur was under sustained enemy fire for the duration.

With typical humility, Rambahadur's own account dwells far more on his feelings for his wounded comrades than on his own actions in the three bold attempts he made to rescue his colleagues. He also credits his short, 5'3" (160cm) stature, for the reason the enemy



A typical patrol during the Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation



From a series of photos taken of Rambahadur 'in action' on Borneo after his award (in some he carries an SLR, in others an M16)

bullets passed over him, even though he spent much of the action pinned to the ground and behind scant cover. His account of his bravery is only two paragraphs and he gives overwhelming credit to his commanding officers (Lieutenant Colonel P. O. Myers and Company Commander Captain C. E. Maunsell) stating, of the two, “Whatever we achieved that day we could never have achieved without the brilliant planning and leadership.” Later he maintained that, “The award is equally shared by all the officers and my fellow soldiers who were serving with me in the days of trouble.”

After rescuing his riflemen colleagues, Rambahadur then re-joined the attack on the left flank. Once more under fire, he gathered up the LMG his wounded men had been forced to abandon. Several more riflemen joined him in a last charge on the enemy position and Rambahadur personally killed four Indonesians in the final firefight. The enemy force was destroyed with 24 dead. The Gurkhas suffered three men killed and two wounded. Unfortunately, both the men Rambahadur had rescued died of the wounds they had sustained. Those casualties would have been far higher if not for Rambahadur’s brave actions and the inspiration he gave to the men around



Lance Corporal Rambahadur at Flagstaff House, Singapore, where he received notice that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross



“THAT HE WAS ABLE TO ACHIEVE WHAT HE DID AGAINST SUCH OVERWHELMING ODDS WITHOUT BEING HIT, WAS MIRACULOUS”

him. His actions were part of a larger battle known as Gunong Tepoi. At an hour long and with high enemy casualties, this was one of the largest and longest actions of the campaign.

In his autobiography, Rambahadur speaks of a premonition he received the night before the action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. He dreamed that his unit would be involved in heavy fighting and that he would be responsible for its failure or success. In his dream he saw a glowing red arc of fire in front of his unit, “a big red burning sun on the ground”, and he alone stepped inside the arc, the other men afraid to step towards it. When he had stepped inside the arc of fire he felt a “strange kind of happiness” and at that moment he woke.

In early 1966, Rambahadur returned to Singapore from Sarawak to discover that his wife was gravely ill. She was admitted to hospital but died on 6 February, with her husband at her side, and leaving Rambahadur the widowed father of two boys, a five year old and a five month old. The tragedy of Rambahadur’s loss at the moment his bravery was being recognised was not lost at the time. Rambahadur tells of his great grief at the loss of his wife at the time rumours of his award were circulating at the barracks (his award was gazetted in April 1966). In his grief, he had decided to leave the army but his officers were lenient with his outbursts – he spoke only in Gurkhali and had to have an interpreter translate for him. Preparations to send Rambahadur to England to accept his Victoria Cross were made as soon as it had been gazetted – he arrived in late May, 1966. Rambahadur speaks of the Gurkha desire to visit England at least once and that he never expected to meet Her Majesty. His eldest son accompanied him to Buckingham Palace for his investiture on 13 July 1966 and the Queen expressed her wish to meet with Rambahadur’s son after the ceremony. Rambahadur was dismayed that his son played with a roll of caps in the presence of the Queen, giving her a scare! For years he continued to remind his son that he was the only person in the world who had ever behaved in such a way before the Queen.

Rambahadur did not leave the army and would in fact serve for 27 years attaining the rank of Queens Gurkha Officer, the equivalent of captain although sometimes listed as lieutenant. On a train journey home to Nepal in 1967, Rambahadur’s medal and all his belongings were stolen from his train carriage. A replacement Victoria Cross was issued along with his other service medals which were also stolen.

At 79, Rambahadur Limbu is the third eldest surviving recipient of the Victoria Cross (the eldest are 99-year-old John Alexander Cruickshank, and 85-year-old Keith Payne). Captain/Queens Gurkha Officer Rambahadur is still active in remembrance services around the world – in 2018 he travelled to Australia and joined in several events with other Victoria Cross recipients.

Images: Alamy, Getty



PETER BADCOE

This major of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam displayed conspicuous bravery on three separate occasions, leading members of the territorial forces of South Vietnam in Thua Thiên-Hué Province

WORDS **MURRAY DAHM**

Born Peter Badcock in South Australia in 1934 (he changed his name to Badcoe in 1961), Badcoe enlisted in the Australian Army in June 1950 when he was only 16 – he had long-held ambitions to join the army despite his father's opposition. Badcoe then joined Officer Cadet School in 1952 and graduated at the end of the year as a second lieutenant in the Royal Australian Artillery. He was promoted to captain in 1960 and, in June 1961, toured to the Federation of Malaysia (after the conclusion of the Malayan Emergency in July 1960 and which had involved troops from Australia since 1950). For a week in November 1962, Badcoe was seconded to observe counter-insurgency techniques in South Vietnam, specifically in Quáng Ngãi Province (located south of Da Nang). Even though he was only there for seven days, he saw combat with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War had begun earlier in 1962, when the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) first arrived in July. These special teams were designed to train and advise local troops – ARVN units, Montagnards, territorial forces and Mobile Strike (Mike) Forces. Although they were 'advisers', members of the AATTV saw some of the fiercest and most dangerous fighting. All four of the Victoria Crosses awarded to Australians during the Vietnam War were to AATTV members, the others being Kevin Wheatley (posthumous), Ray Simpson and Keith Payne. Australia's (sometimes controversial) involvement in Vietnam would last until 1973 and would see the introduction of conscription in 1964 for men to serve a two-year term in the Australian Army. In all, almost 60,000 Australians served in the war, mostly army but also navy and air force personnel. Of those, 3,000 were wounded and 521 were killed – including Major Peter Badcoe, who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his conspicuous bravery in 1967.



Captain Badcoe served in Malaya and while there spent a brief period in Vietnam to observe counter-insurgency techniques

Badcoe transferred to the Royal Australian Infantry Corps in 1965 and was promoted to major in August that year. Exactly a year later, in August 1966, he arrived in Vietnam as part of the AATTV. His first post was as a sub-sector adviser in the Nam Hóa District of Thua Thiên-Hué Province located in the centre of Vietnam; the city of Hué is its capital.

His responsibilities included working with sections of the South Vietnamese Territorial



“HIS PERSONAL LEADERSHIP, WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, AND ACTIONS IN THE FACE OF HOSTILE ENEMY FIRE FORCED THE PLATOON TO SUCCESSFULLY ASSAULT THE ENEMY POSITION AND CAPTURE IT”

VC citation regarding action on 23 February 1967

Forces – the Regional Force (RF) and the Popular Force (PF), both forms of full-time militia and known in Aussie slang as 'Ruff-Puffs'. Both Australian and American forces operated similar schemes; advisers would accompany territorial patrols and often became involved in firefights.

During Badcoe's first week on the job he saw combat and displayed the kind of leadership, ingenuity, audacity, optimism, fearlessness, determination and aggression for which he was (and was to become) renowned. With the men under his command pinned down by a Viet Cong bunker, and after several attempts to silence the bunker had proven unsuccessful, the militia commander suggested calling in air support. Badcoe replied that would not be necessary and took two jerrycans of petrol from a jeep, made his way, undetected, behind the bunker, poured the petrol onto it and then ignited it with a phosphorous grenade. By this action he took out the enemy bunker and saved the lives of many of his men. He also lived up to the motto of the AATTV: 'Perseverance.'

Badcoe did not look the part of the stereotypical brave soldier – he was short, stocky, losing his hair and wore glasses. His Methodist faith meant that he did not drink or smoke; he preferred reading military history in his leisure hours. At the same time, he was

"IN THE FACE OF CERTAIN DEATH AND HEAVY LOSSES HIS PERSONAL COURAGE AND LEADERSHIP TURNED CERTAIN DEFEAT INTO VICTORY"

VC citation regarding action on 7 March 1967

conscientious, enthusiastic and energetic on exercises, just as he was in combat.

In December 1966, he was appointed the operations adviser for the entire Thua Thiên-Hué Province, based in Hué. This role was usually interpreted as much more of a logistical desk job, but Badcoe was far more hands-on and accompanied patrols whenever he was able to. Three such actions in which he was involved were mentioned on his Victoria Cross citation – on 23 February, 7 March and 7 April 1967.

On 23 February, Badcoe was accompanying an RF territorial patrol in concert with an American-advised PF platoon on his flank in Phu Thu District. The flanking patrol came under fire and, over the radio, Badcoe learned that the adviser, Captain Clement, had been killed and his deputy, Sergeant Thomas, had been wounded in attempting to reach his captain. Under enemy fire and without a thought for his own safety, Badcoe ran 600 metres across rice paddies under enemy fire to reach the PF patrol. He learned that Clement was lying 160 metres ahead of the platoon, having gone to the aid of a wounded soldier. Thomas lay wounded and exposed ahead of the platoon's position.

Badcoe took command of the PF platoon and led a frontal assault on the enemy position; they were dug in on a ridge and of approximately company strength. He personally led the charge and took out an enemy machine gun position. The charge inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Once the victory and position were consolidated, although still under enemy fire, Badcoe returned to retrieve Clement's body. He then went back for Thomas and assisted him to safety.

Badcoe's fearlessness and aggression, as well as his behaviour, led some colleagues to worry that he considered himself invincible and that his actions were reckless rather than brave. His letters home, however, reveal that he was not reckless in the least, although he included brutal details of the wounds men



The Australian Army Training Team Vietnam was formed to train and advise local troops

under his command had suffered. At the same time, he showed extreme self-deprecation. He wrote home to his wife in January 1967: "Don't worry about me my little darling. Petie is still the most highly qualified professional coward of them all and I still hold the record for 'fastest man behind the paddy bund'." His actions would prove he was anything but the man he wrote home about.

On 7 March, only two weeks after the action in Phu Thu District, Badcoe accompanied an RF section to the village of Quang Điến, 25km northwest of Hué. When they arrived, the village had been taken over by the Viet Cong and the district headquarters of the RF was under assault. Badcoe formed his force into platoons and led them through enemy fire to flank the Viet Cong position. He then led his men in an assault across open ground against the enemy, taking them by surprise and forcing them to retreat in utter disorder.

On 7 April, while covering for a fellow officer who was sick, Badcoe became aware via radio traffic that an operation around the hamlet of An Thuan, 12km north of Hué, was going badly. This operation involved two RF companies as well as a squadron of APCs and an elite company of the 1st ARVN Division, the Hac Bao (Black Panthers). Two companies of Viet Cong were well dug-in and had inflicted heavy losses on the ARVN. There were no advisers present with the ARVN and RF forces – that meant they could not call in artillery or air support. Jumping in a jeep with a deputy adviser, Badcoe sped to the scene of the firefight. They arrived just as another assault was imminent and Badcoe and his deputy climbed aboard an APC.



Major Badcoe firing an M16 rifle at Holsworthy Barracks, Sydney, 1966

Dismounting and joining the Hac Bao, they came under intense enemy fire that forced them to retreat. Badcoe rallied the ARVN forces and called in an artillery strike. Pushing forward and encouraging a final assault across open paddy fields, the distinctive Badcoe drew enemy fire. He refused to fall back again, however, and instead headed towards an enemy machine gun position. As he rose to throw his grenade to take out the position, he was hit by machine gun fire and killed instantly. His conduct did, however, inspire the Hac Bao who, after close air support and artillery had been called in by Badcoe's wounded deputy, assaulted and took the enemy position.

Badcoe was gazetted for a posthumous Victoria Cross on 13 October 1967, where each of these three actions was referenced along with superlative praise of his conduct. His medal was presented to Badcoe's widow, Denise, by the governor-general of Australia on 5 April 1968. In addition to the Victoria Cross, Badcoe was also awarded the US Silver Star with oak leaf, and the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star.

He was buried, as per his wishes, in the Terendak Camp Military Cemetery in Malacca, Malaysia. When 22 other Australians buried there were repatriated in 2015, the Badcoe family insisted that he remained there in accordance with his wishes – he, his wife and three daughters had all lived together at Terendak when he was stationed in Malaysia. He has continued to be honoured in South Australia and more widely with an electoral district renamed in his honour in 2016 and a Returned Services League residential aged care facility named in his honour in 2020.

Images: Alamy, Getty, Wiki / PD / Gov

The last members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam to arrive home, 21 December 1972



WILLIE APIATA

When this SAS soldier carried his injured comrade through 70 metres of enemy fire, he became an overnight national hero

WORDS **FRANCES WHITE**

Willie Apiata's youth was anything but stable. Born in Mangakino in the North Island of New Zealand to a Maori father and Pakeha mother, he was the youngest of four siblings with three older sisters. However, when he was an infant, his parents separated, and he saw little of his father. He spent most of his early days in Northland, but when Apiata was seven, the family moved to Te Kaha in Eastland.

He attended Te Whanau-a-Apanui school, but found it difficult to focus on his studies, instead feeling the draw of the army. In 1989, at the age of 15, the young Apiata left school and enlisted in the New Zealand Army as a territorial soldier. He began a career that was fated to become legendary.

While serving as a territorial soldier, Apiata attempted to fulfil his dream of joining the SAS, but he was not immediately successful. Undeterred, he applied for the SAS again in 2001 and began training in 2002. In 2004, just a year after he had become a father, he was posted to Afghanistan as part of an SAS patrol. It was here that he would face a situation in the field that would change his life forever.

Night had fallen and the Kiwi troops had set up a defensive formation, while many attempted to get some rest. They were positioned in a rocky, rural area with plenty of places for men to hide.

Unfortunately for them, this was exactly what the enemy was doing. Suddenly, and without warning, the troops were attacked. About 20 enemy combatants emerged from the darkness and grenades rained down on the unsuspecting SAS troops. The initial attack was aimed at one of the unit's vehicles, and unluckily for Apiata, this was where he was sleeping. While the SAS soldier slept soundly on the bonnet of the truck, a grenade landed nearby. As it exploded, he was blown off the bonnet with the impact. Confused, Apiata picked himself off the ground and attempted to see through the rising plumes of smoke.

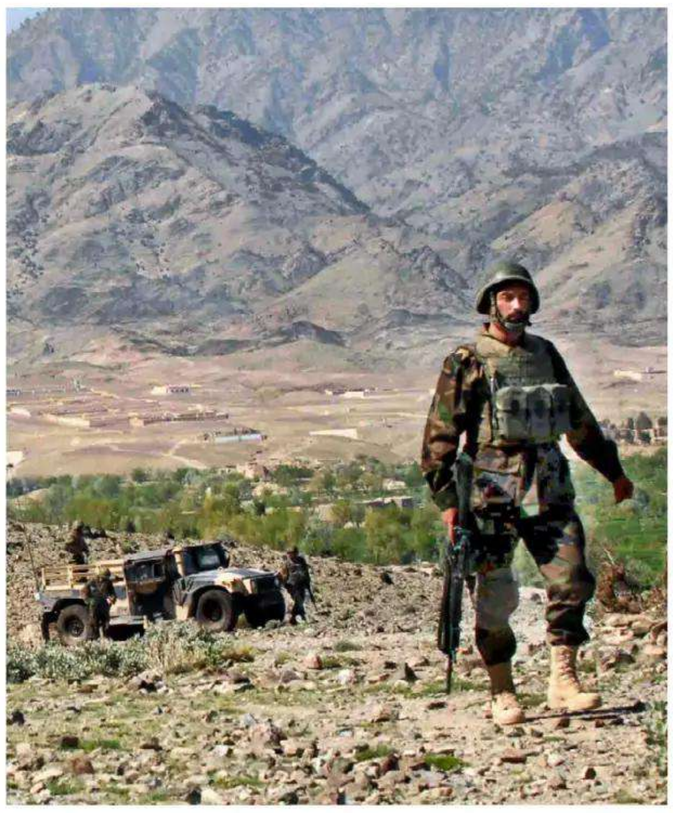
Miraculously, he was uninjured, but not everyone had been so lucky. Two other soldiers had been hit by shrapnel, and one of them, known only as Corporal D, was seriously wounded. Two soldiers were attempting to apply first aid to the struggling man, but it was useless – Corporal D's injuries were life-threatening, and he was bleeding out fast.

Apiata surveyed the situation: with enemy fire becoming increasingly intense and the SAS men kneeling over Corporal D's body in a very exposed position, it was only a matter of time before enemy bullets found their targets. The grenade had destroyed one of their two vehicles, which was smouldering and pumping out thick black smoke, and the other was immobilised. There was no way they would be able to load Corporal D into it to make an escape. The wounded soldier was deteriorating before Apiata's eyes; he couldn't wait – he needed medical help and he needed it now. With the machine-gun fire becoming ever more intense, the soldiers attempted to take cover, but Apiata had other plans.

Grasping his wounded comrade and lifting him up, Apiata carried the bleeding soldier in his arms and began to walk back towards the rest of his team, who had taken up defensive positions. The machine-gun fire was relentless, and grenades continued to rain down as he moved through the rocky terrain.

Apiata walked 70 metres through exposed ground and enemy fire to where the rest of their troops were stationed. Those waiting to receive them watched in horror as Apiata's form was lit up from the light of the blazing vehicle and the constant firing of weapons. Miraculously, Apiata and Corporal D made it through without being hit a single time. "Nothing hit me," Apiata later commented. "I can't explain why I didn't get hit when we were crossing that hill through the fire. It's a miracle we made it." Now with Corporal D able to receive proper medical attention, Apiata immediately returned to the fight.

To Apiata, it was a small act. A spur of the moment decision to help his comrade, but



***Left:** The mountainous terrain of Afghanistan made enemy combatants difficult to spot*

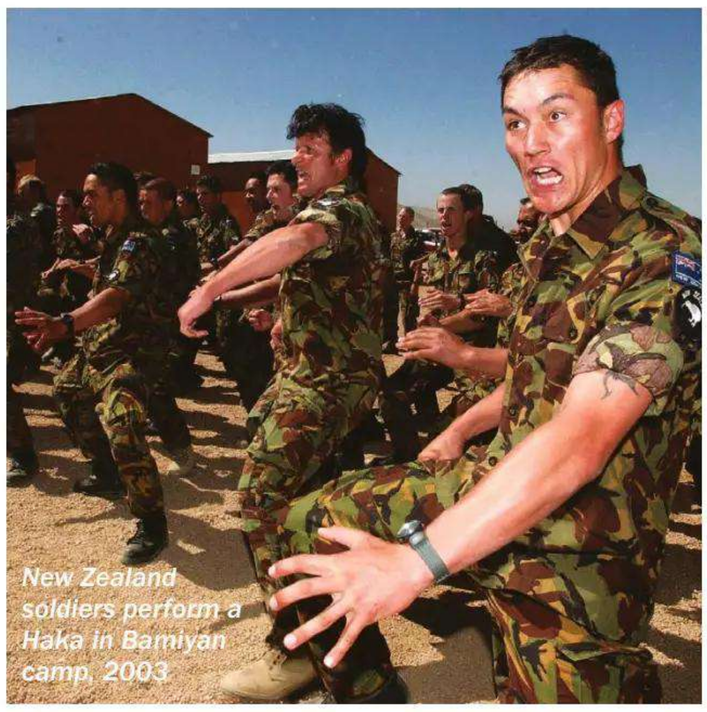
"CORPORAL APIATA CARRIED A SEVERELY WOUNDED FELLOW SOLDIER ACROSS OPEN GROUND WHILE COMING UNDER INTENSE ATTACK. HE DID THIS DESPITE THE EXTREME DANGER TO HIMSELF"

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark

Apiata at a 2008 service to honour past and present VC heroes

"HIS COURAGEOUS ACTIONS, WITH TOTAL DISREGARD FOR HIS OWN SAFETY, SAVED THE LIFE OF HIS COMRADE AND SHOULD BE SALUTED BY ALL NEW ZEALANDERS"

RSA President John Campbell



New Zealand soldiers perform a Haka in Bamiyan camp, 2003

his actions had saved a life. Corporal D had been suffering from arterial bleeding, and later medical evaluation revealed that he would have likely died from blood loss had Apiata's bravery not ensured he received timely medical attention. After recovering from his injuries, Corporal D returned to active duty.

Once reports of what Apiata had done began to flood in, the New Zealand Defence Force headquarters decided to push for the highest military honour. By this point, Apiata's first SAS deployment to Afghanistan had ended, and he was getting on with his ordinary life.

Although he was honoured at receiving the Victoria Cross, publicity-shy Apiata never fully embraced the celebrity status it brought him. When it was announced in 2007 that he was to become one of the very few living holders of the medal, he almost rejected it.

Apiata was no glory hunter, he was a mild, no-nonsense soldier who didn't see his actions as anything heroic, and he feared the publicity that would come his way with such an honour. His comrades in the unit later commented: "Willie didn't want the medal." In fact Apiata was so against it that he seriously considered resigning rather than be the subject of such attention while still serving in the SAS.

It took strong words from his commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Jim Blackwell to prevent Apiata from walking. Apiata feared that his face becoming recognisable would negatively impact his career, or even the work of the SAS, but Blackwell reasoned that publicity would actually help boost the reputation of the unit. Not only would it attract new recruits, which they were severely lacking, but would also hopefully encourage the government to give them more money and equipment. Listening carefully to his words, Apiata finally agreed.

The publicity surrounding Apiata was huge. The soldier was hastily groomed for the media and coached in perfect interview techniques. However, he refused to acknowledge what he did as anything but ordinary. "I was only doing my job and looking after my mates," Apiata told a media conference in Wellington.

When asked if he regarded himself as a role model, he replied: "I see myself as Willie Apiata. I'm just an ordinary person." Soon, a television reconstruction of the events was produced, a history of the New Zealand SAS was released, and a Willie Apiata biography appropriately titled *Reluctant Hero* was written. Now one of the most recognisable faces in New Zealand, Apiata went on a celebratory tour around the country.

Although the media buzz surrounding him was still high, Apiata was keen to return to work; it was all he had wanted to do the whole time. Unaccustomed to the spotlight, Apiata returned to the field to continue serving.

Although he was grateful to receive the Victoria Cross, commenting that "it means a lot to me, to my family and the unit itself," in April 2008 he donated the medal to the New Zealand SAS Trust.

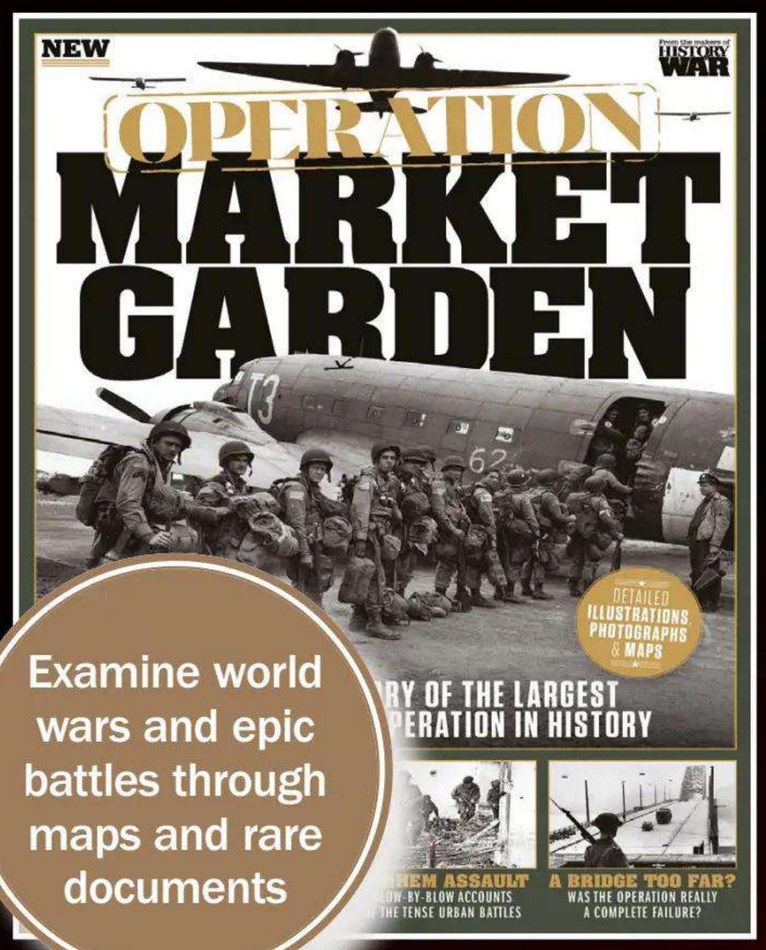
In July 2012, Apiata left full-time military service to teach young people adventure skills, however, he remains with the NZSAS Reserve forces. Although the attention is something he continues to believe he doesn't deserve, he remains a national hero and inspiration to young New Zealanders.



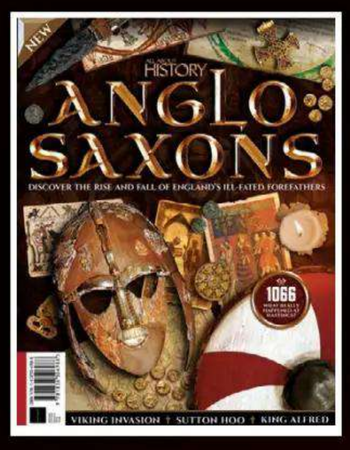
In 2014, Apiata met Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace

Apiata pictured at an Armistice Day ceremony, 2018

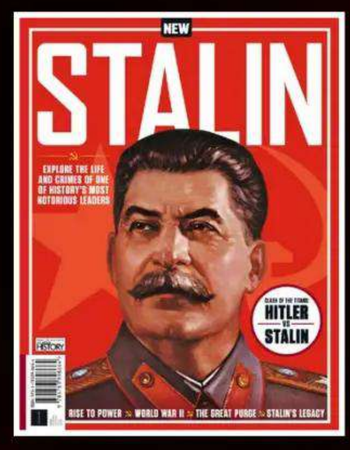
Images: Getty

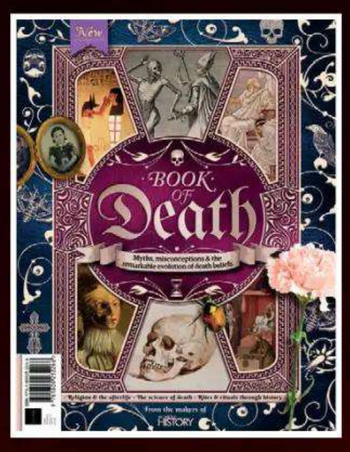


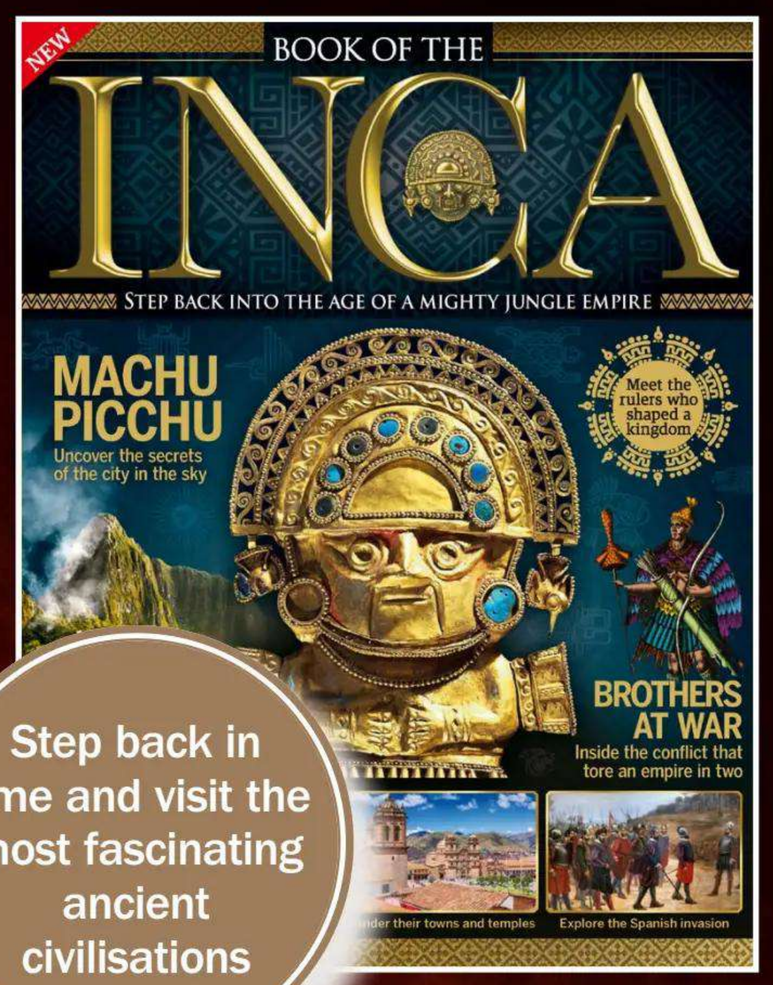
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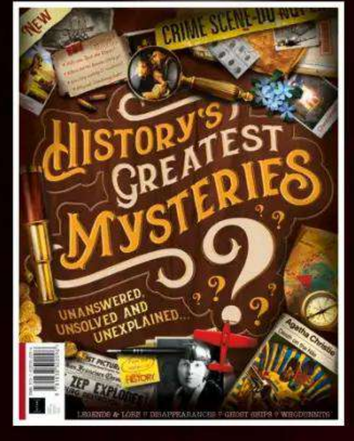


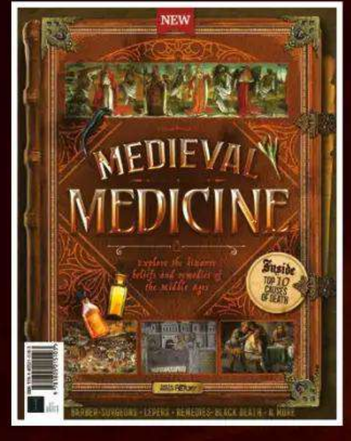


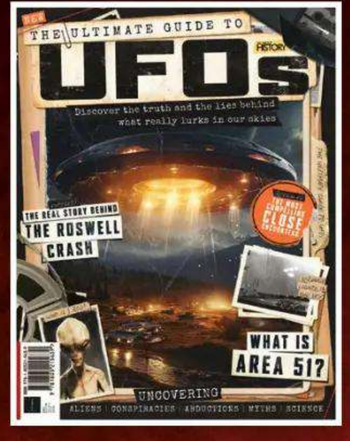




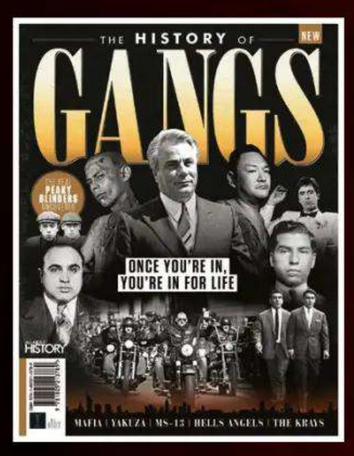


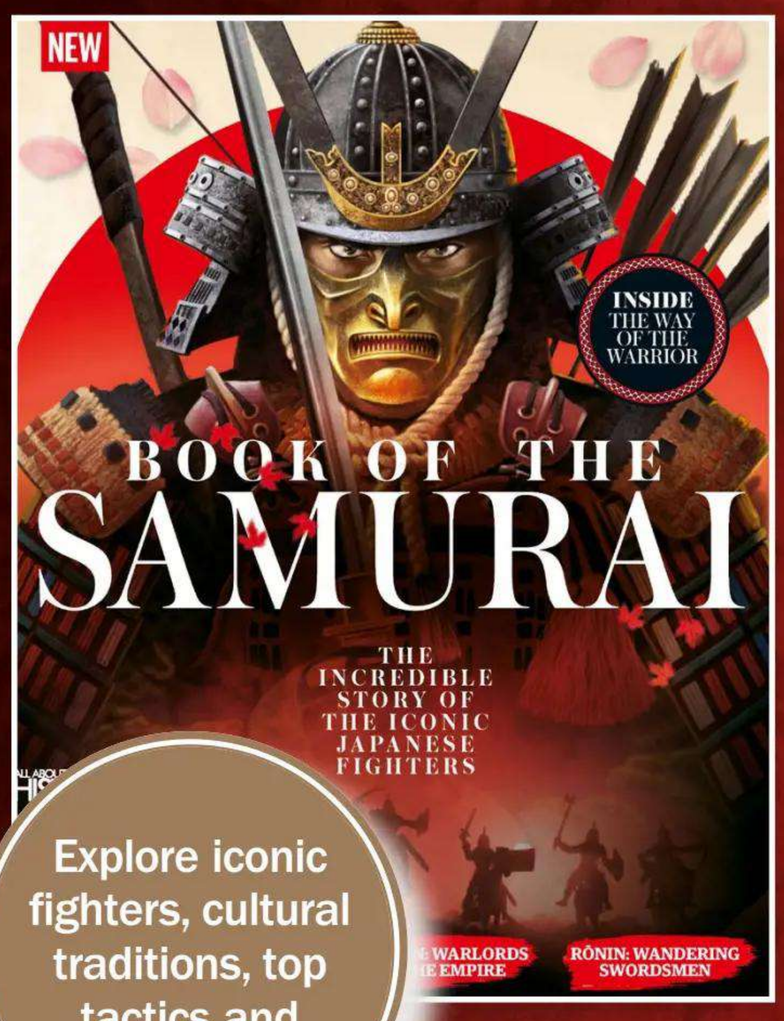




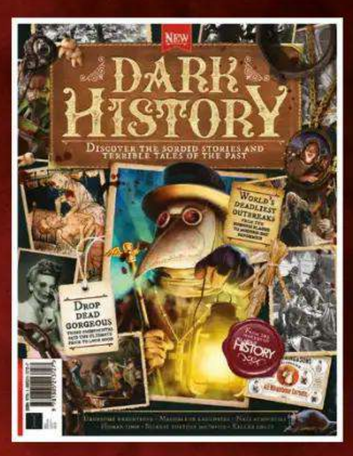


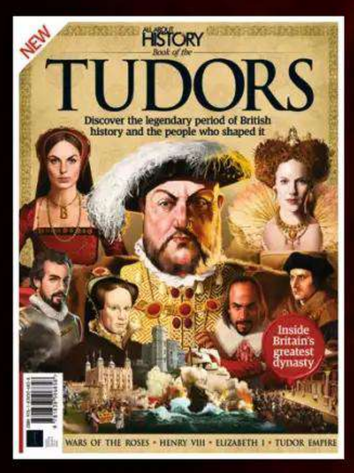
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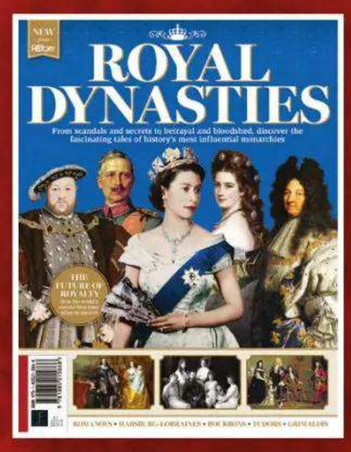


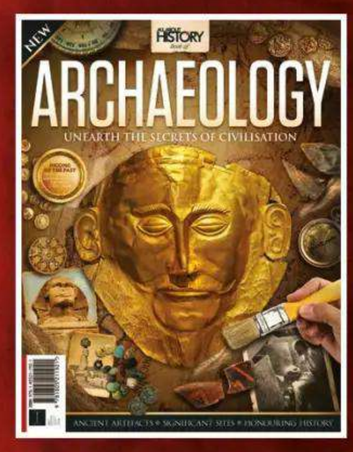






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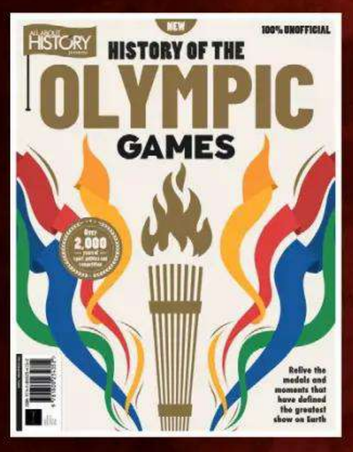


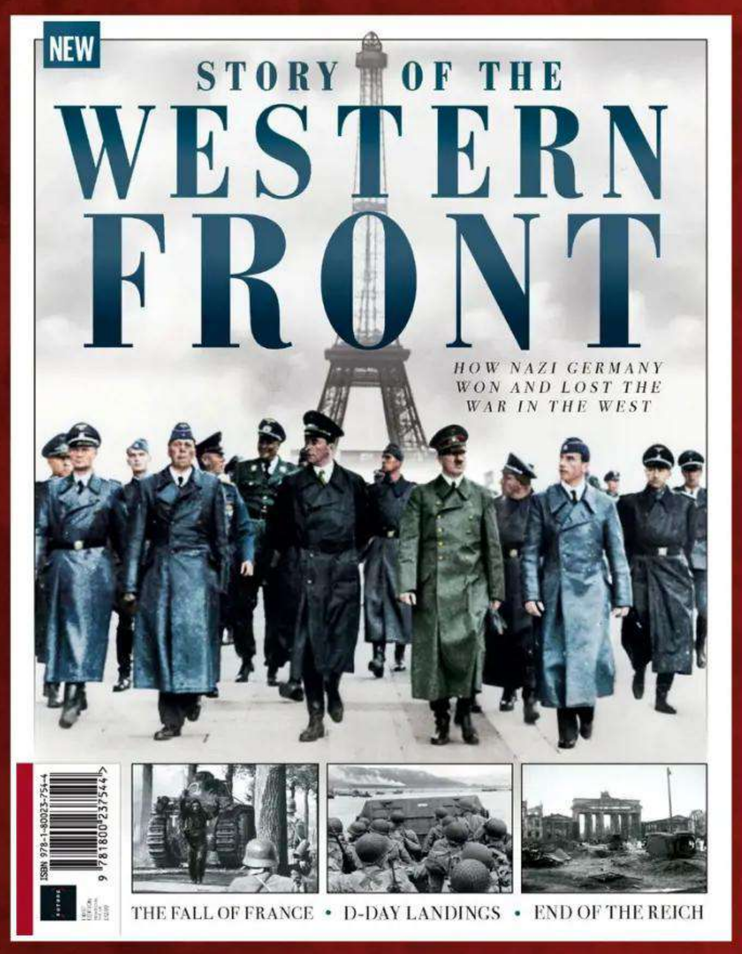


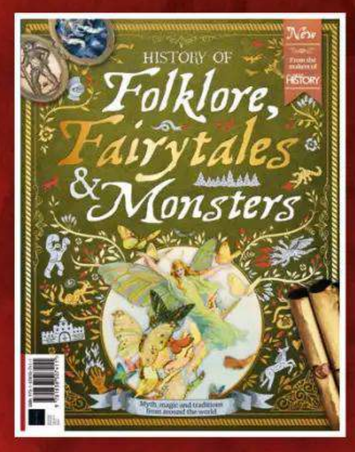
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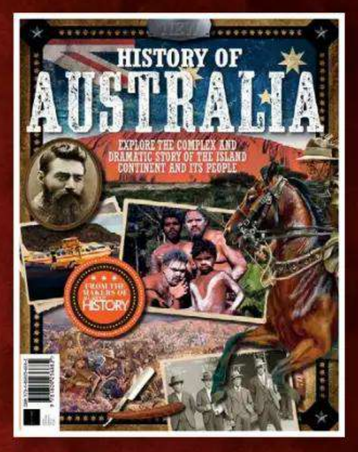
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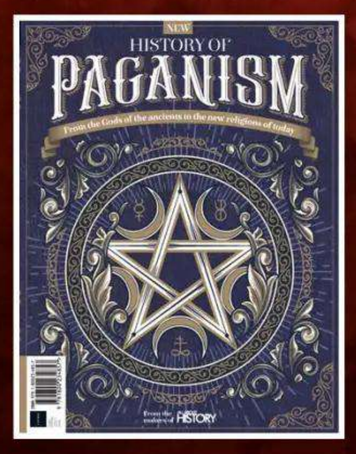


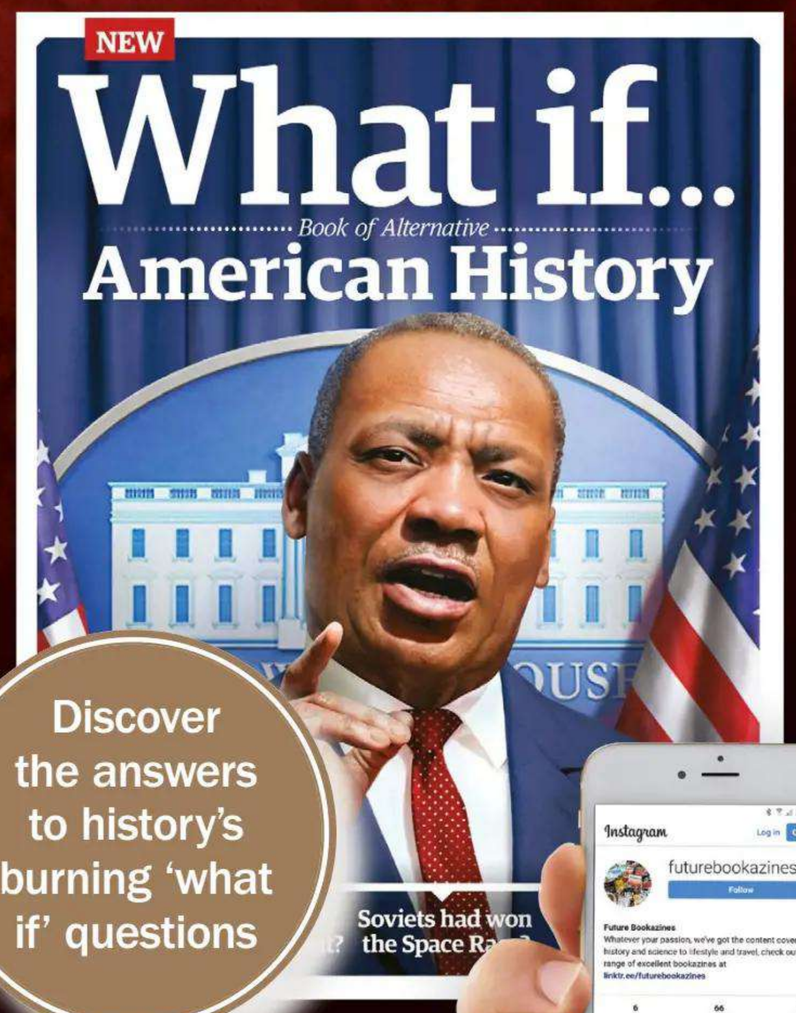
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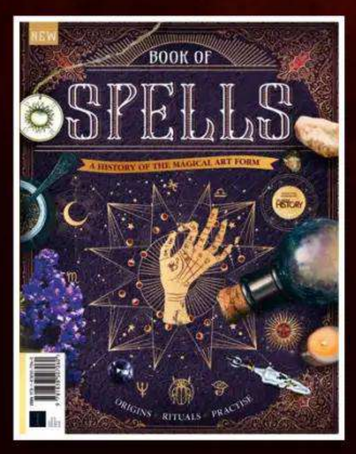












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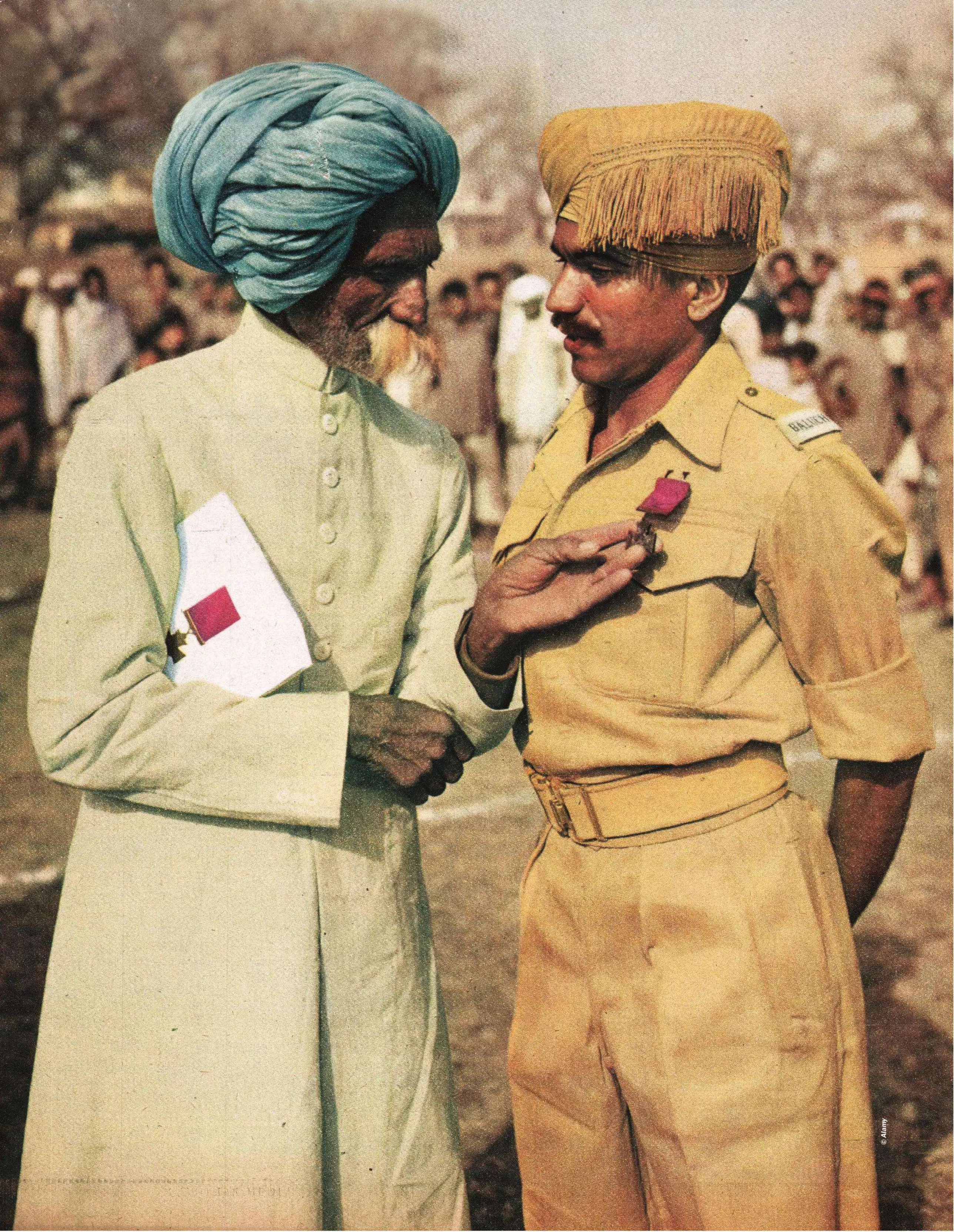
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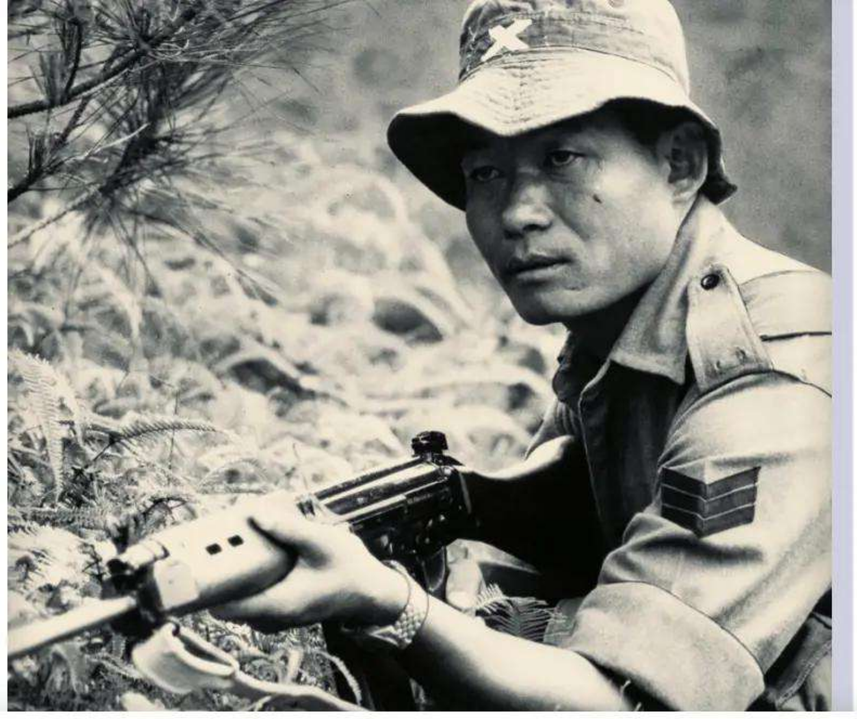
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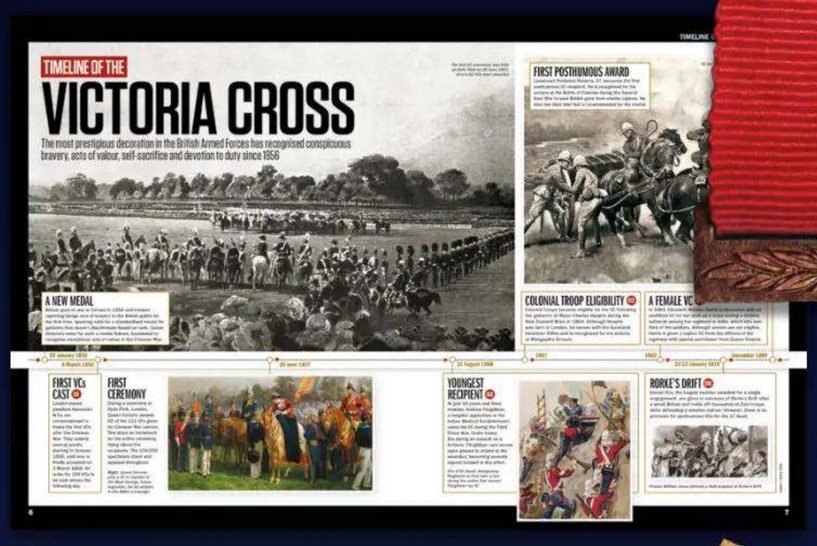




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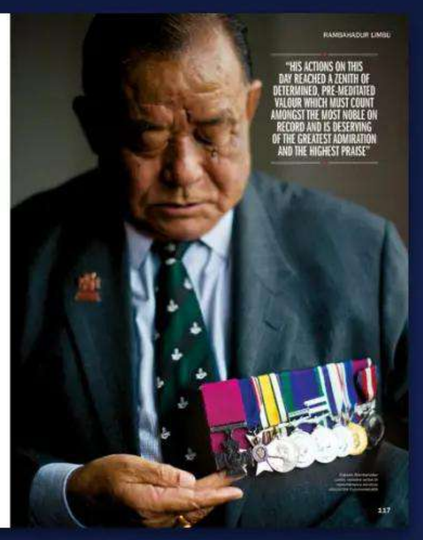
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